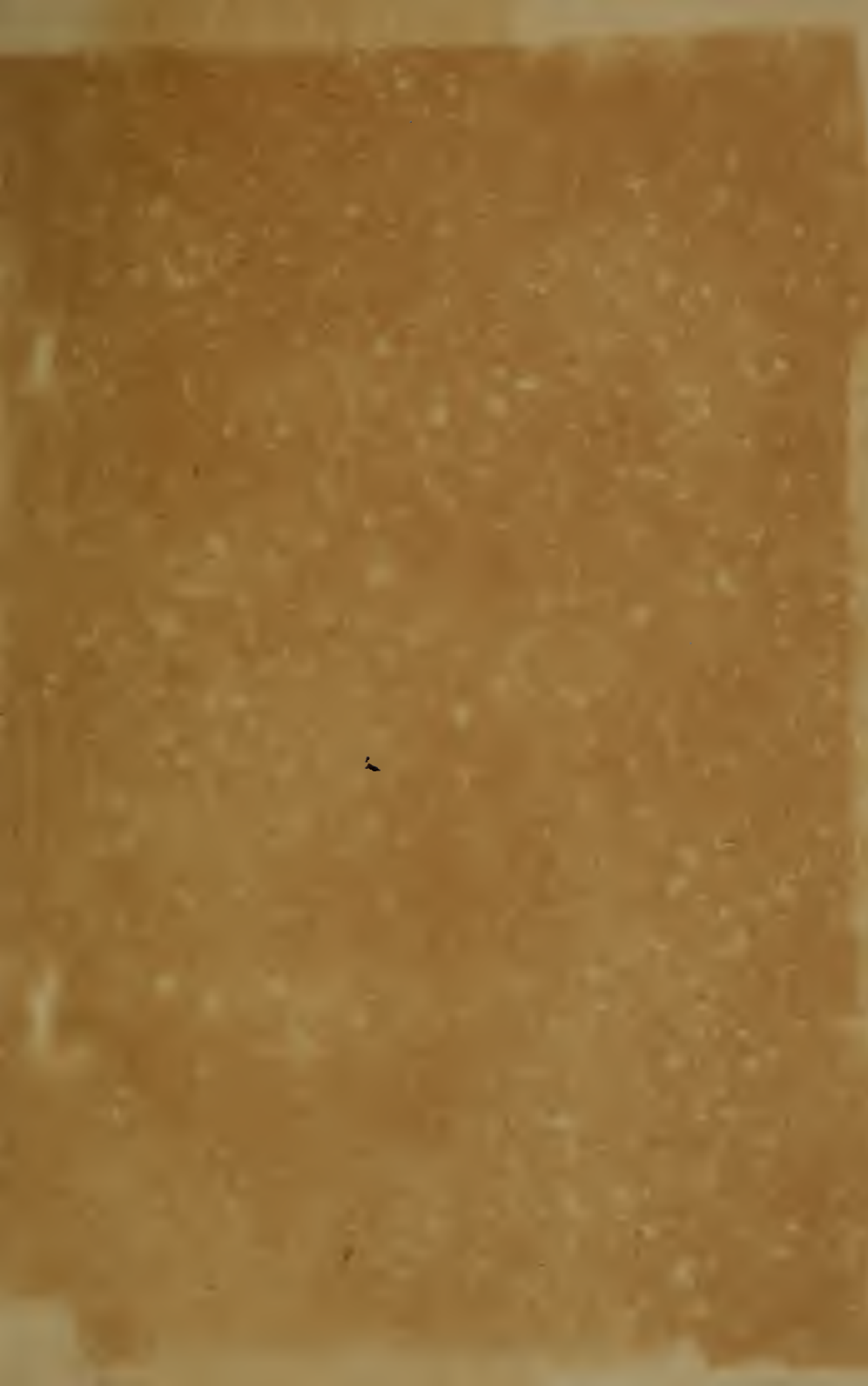
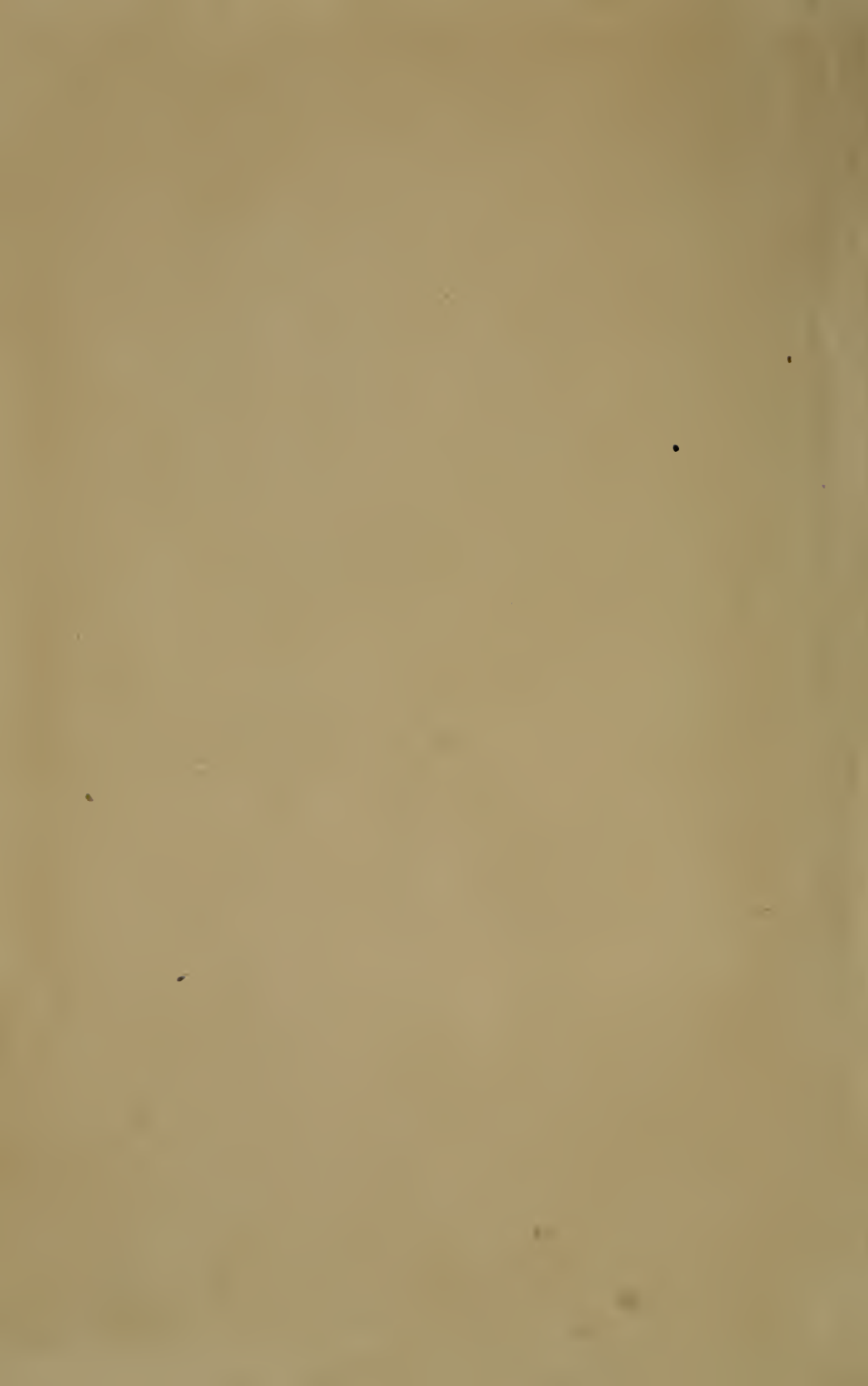




LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
F359 pa
v. 2





THE PARSON O' DUMFORD.

VOL. II.

THE
PARSON O' DUMFORD.

A Tale.

BY
GEORGE MANVILLE FENN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

LONDON:
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193 PICCADILLY.
1879.

[All Rights reserved.]

Bungay

CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS

823

F359 pa

v. 2

CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. TO BULTITUDE'S AND BACK . . .	1
II. AN EVENTFUL WALK . . .	16
III. BANKS'S OBSTINACY . . .	33
IV. JOHN MAINE'S HEADACHE . . .	47
V. THE VICAR'S SOUP . . .	73
VI. BY THE CHALK PIT . . .	94
VII. AT HOME . . .	106
VIII. OLD FRIENDS AGAIN . . .	114
IX. LOST . . .	125
X. A FRUITLESS SEARCH . . .	145
XI. A FRIENDLY MEETING . . .	160
XII. THREATENINGS . . .	171

CHAP.	PAGE
XIII. PODMORE SEEKS AN ALLY . . .	188
XIV. JESSIE'S TROUBLES . . .	198
XV. A THANKLESS TASK . . .	212
XVI. SAVED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF . .	224
XVII. A DECEITFUL CALM . . .	247
XVIII. SIM SLEE'S PATRIOTISM . . .	254
XIX. THE FOREMAN'S APOLOGY . . .	265
XX. AT DUMFORD CHURCH . . .	278

PARSON O' DUMFORD.

CHAPTER I.

TO BULTITUDE'S AND BACK.

MATTERS did not improve at Dumford as the days went on, and Murray Selwood found that he could not have arrived at a worse time, so far as his own comfort was concerned, though he was bound to own that the occasion was opportune for his parish, inasmuch as he was able to be of no little service to many of the people who, in a surly kind of way, acknowledged his help, and took it in a condescending manner, while, with a smile, he could not help realizing the fact that the sturdy independent folks looked down upon him as a kind of paid

official whom they were obliged to suffer in their midst.

He had secured a servant with great difficulty, for the girls of the place, as a rule, objected to domestic service, preferring the freedom and independence of working for the line-growing farmers of the neighbourhood, and spending the money earned with the big draper of the place. Not our independent friends, but Barmby the parish churchwarden, who coolly told the vicar that he could produce more effect upon the female population with a consignment of new hats or bonnets from town, than a parson could with a month's preaching; and it must be conceded to Mr. Barmby that his influence was far more visible than that of his clerical superior.

All efforts to patch up a peace between the locked-out men and their employer were without avail, even though the vicar had seen both parties again and again.

"Let them pay for my machine-bands," said

Richard Glaire—"Two hundred pounds, and come humbly and confess their faults, and I'll then take their application into consideration."

"But don't you think you had better make a greater concession?" said the vicar. "You are punishing innocent and guilty alike."

"Serve 'em right," said Richard, turning on his heel, and leaving the counting-house, where Mr. Selwood had sought him.

"What do you say, Mr. Banks?" said the vicar.

"Well, sir, what I say is this," said Joe, pulling out and examining a keen knife that he took from his pocket, "what I say is this—that he ought to find out whom this knife belongs to, and punish him."

"That knife?"

"Yes," said Joe, grimly. "I've been well over the place, and I found this knife lying on a bench. It is the one used for cootting the bands; there's the greasy marks on it. Now,

the man as that knife belongs to," he said, closing the blade with a snap, "is him as coot the bands."

"By the way, did you ever find the bands?" said the vicar.

"Find 'em, parson, oh yes, I fun 'em; chucked into one of the furnaces they weer."

"And burnt?"

"Well, not exactly bunt, but so cockered up and scorched, as to be no more good. I only wish I knew who did it."

"It was a cowardly trick," said the vicar, "and I wish it were known, so that this unhappy strife might be stayed."

"Oh, that'll come raight soon," said Banks, drily. "Just wait till Master Dick has been over to the bank and seen how his book stands once or twice, and we'll soon bring this game to an end."

"And meanwhile the poor people are starving."

"Not they, sir," said Joe, with a chuckle.

“People here are too saving. They’ll hold out a bit longer yet.”

Joe remained to smoke a pipe amongst the extinct forges, while the vicar paid a morning call at the big house, to find Mrs. Glaire and Eve gone for a walk, and Jacky Budd visible in the garden, fast asleep on a rustic chair, with the flies haunting his nose.

Turning from there he went down the street, and had to bow to Miss Purley, who was at the doctor’s window, and to Miss Primgeon, who was at the lawyer’s window, both ladies having been there ever since he passed. Then reaching the vicarage, it was to find that he had had a visitor in his turn in the shape of his churchwarden, Mr. Bultitude, “Owd Billy Bultitude,” as he was generally called in the town, just outside which he had a large farm and was reported to be very wealthy.

“Parish matters, I suppose,” said the vicar ; and he stood debating with himself for a few minutes as to whether he should go across the

fields, ending by making a start, and coming across Richard Glaire deep in converse with Sim Slee, just by the cross-roads.

Something white was passed by Richard to the gentleman of the plaid waistcoat, as the vicar approached, and then they moved on together for a few yards, unaware of the coming footsteps.

"That looks like coming to terms," said the vicar to himself, joyfully. "Well, I'm glad of it," and he was about to speak on the subject, when Richard started round with a scowl upon his countenance, and Slee thrust his hands into his pockets and went off whistling.

"As you will, master Dick," said the vicar to himself; "but I mean to try hard yet to get the whip hand of you, my boy." Then, aloud, "What a delightful morning."

"Look here, Mr. Selwood," said Richard, roughly, "are you playing the spy upon my actions?"

"Not I," said the vicar, laughing, "I am

going over to Bultitude's farm ; I cannot help your being in the way. Good morning."

"He was watching me," muttered Dick, biting his nails. "I wonder whether he saw that note."

As he stood looking after the vicar, Sim Slee came softly back to wink in a mysterious way, and point with his thumb over his shoulder.

"They're all alike," he said—"all alike, parsons and all."

"What do you mean ?" said Dick, roughly. "I thought you'd gone with that note."

"Thowt I wouldn't go yet," said Sim, with another confidential jerk of the thumb over his shoulder. "Joe Banks is sure to be at home now."

"I tell you he's down at the foundry, and will stay there all day," cried Dick, angrily.

"All raight : I'll go then," said Sim ; "but I say, sir, they're all alike."

"What do you mean ?"

"Why that parson—that dreadfully good man."

"Well, what about him?"

"Don't you know where he's gone?"

"Yes, he said: old Bultitude's."

"Did he say what for?" said Sim, grinning.

"No, of course not."

"Ho—ho—ho! Ho—ho—ho!" laughed Sim, stamping on the ground with delight.

"Don't you see his game?"

"Curse you, speak out," cried Dick, furiously.

"What do you mean?"

"Only that he's getting all the women under his thumb. He'll be having crosses and candles in the chutch direckly, like the Ranby man."

"Curse you for a fool, Slee," cried Richard, impatiently; and he was turning away when Sim exclaimed—

"Don't you know as Miss Eve walked over there half-an-hour ago?"

"What?" roared Dick.

"Oh! she's only gone over to see Miss

Jessie, of course; but if you'll light a cigar, sir, and sit down on yon gate, you'll see if he don't walk home with her. Now I'm off."

"Stop a moment, Sim," cried Dick in a husky voice. "Have—have you ever seen anything?"

"Who? I? Oh, no! Nowt," said Sim; "leastwise I only saw 'em come out of Ranby wood with a basket of flowers yesterday, that's all."

He went off then, chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands, leaving the poison to work, as, with his face distorted with rage, Dick started off at a sharp walk for Bultitude's farm; but, altering his mind, he leaped a stile, lit a cigar, and stood leaning against a tree smoking, unseen by any one who should pass along the lane; but able to command the path on both sides for some distance, up and down.

Meanwhile the vicar, enjoying the pleasant walk, had been telling himself that he could always leave the grimy town and its work

behind in a few minutes to enjoy the sweets of the country, which were here in all their beauty; and after thinking of Eve Pelly for about five minutes, he made a vigorous effort, uttered the word *taboo*, and began humming a tune.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind, the tune he inadvertently began to hum was one of those which Eve sang the other night, so he left off with a hasty "Pish!" and stooping down, began to botanize, picking a flower here and there, and then climbing up the rough side of the lane to cull a pretty little fern, whose graceful fronds drooped from a shadowy niche.

He threw the fern impatiently down, as he reached the path once more, and his brow furrowed, for memory told him directly that it was the pretty little *asplenium*, the peculiarities of whose growth he had explained to Eve when he met her with Mrs. Glaire the day before, and had passed with them through Ranby wood, the latter lady probably being too

insignificant to be taken in by Mr. Sim Slee's comprehensive vision.

Walking rapidly on, to calm his thoughts, he came across the object of his search, busily dragging a sheep out of a little narrow grip or drain that had been cut in the field, and into which the unfortunate animal had rolled feet uppermost, its heavy wet fleece, and the size of the drain, making it impossible for the timid beast to extricate itself.

"Fahrweltered, parson," said the bluff-looking farmer, as he came up.

"I beg your pardon," said the vicar.

"Fahrweltered—fahrweltered," said the farmer, laughing; "we say in these parts a sheep's fahrweltered when he gets on his back like that. I expect," he continued, with a roguish twinkle of his eye, "you've found some of your flock fahrweltered by this time."

"Indeed, I have," said the vicar, laughing; "and so far the shepherd has not been able to drag them out."

“No, I s’pose not,” said the farmer, carefully wiping his hands upon a big yellow silk handkerchief before offering one to be shaken. “You’ve got your work coot out, my lad, and no mistake. But come on up to the house, and have a bit of something. I come over to you about the meeting, and the books, and the rest of it.”

The vicar followed him up to the farm-house, where the heavy stack-yard, abundant display of cattle, and noises of the yard told of prosperity; and then leading the way through the red-brick passage into the long, low, plainly-furnished sitting-room, the first words Murray Selwood heard were—

“Jess, Miss Pelly, I’ve brought you a visitor.”

The vicar’s cheek burned, as he could not help a start, but he recovered himself directly as he saw Eve Pelly’s sweet face, with its calm unruffled look, and replied to the frank pressure of her hand, as she said she was delighted to see him.

"This is my niece, Jessie," said the farmer in his bluff way. "She says, parson——"

"Oh, uncle!" cried the pleasant, bright-faced girl.

"Howd your tongue, lass; I shall tell him. She says, parson, she's glad our old foggy has gone, for it's some pleasure to come and hear you."

"Oh, Mr. Selwood, please," said the girl, blushing, "I didn't quite say that. Uncle does——"

"'Zaggerate," said the old man, laughing. "Well, perhaps he does. But come, girl, get in a bit of lunch. There, what now, Miss Pelly; are we frightening you away?"

"Oh, no," said Eve, smiling, "only I must go now."

"Sit thee down, lass, sit thee down. Parson's going back directly, and he'll walk wi' thee and see thee safe home."

And so it came about that innocently enough an hour afterwards the vicar and Eve Pelly.

were walking back together with, as they came in sight of Richard Glaire, Eve eagerly speaking to her companion, and becoming so earnest in her pleading words for her cousin, that she laid one little hand on the vicar's arm.

"You will like him when you come to know him, Mr. Selwood," she was saying, in her earnest endeavour that Richard should be well thought of by everybody. "Poor boy, he has been so annoyed and worried over the strike, that he is not like the same. It is enough to make him cross and low-spirited, is it not?"

"Indeed it is," said the vicar, quietly; "and you may be quite at rest with respect to your cousin, for he will, for —— he will always find a friend in me."

He had been about to say, "for your sake," but a glance at the sweet, candid face arrested his words, and he told himself that anything that would in the slightest degree tend to disturb her pure faith and belief in the man

who was to be her husband would be cruelty, for there was the hope that her gentle winning ways and innocent heart would be the means of influencing Richard Glaire, and making him a better man.

“Hallo, you two!” made them start, as Richard leaped over the stile, and seemed surprised to find that neither of them looked startled or troubled at his sudden apparition. “Here, Eve, take my arm. I’m going home.”

“Thank you, Dick,” she said, quietly. “I have something to carry.”

He scowled and relapsed into a moody silence, which no efforts on the vicar’s part could break. Fortunately, the distance back to the town was very short, and so he parted from them at the foot of the High-street, the rest of the distance being occupied by Richard in a torrent of abuse of Eve, and invectives against the vicar, whom he characterized as a beggarly meddling upstart, and ended by sending the girl up to her room in tears.

CHAPTER II.

AN EVENTFUL WALK.

RICHARD GLAIRE made the most of his short time for scolding, and sulked to a great extent with his cousin for the next few days, and then the tables were turned, for it came to pass one evening that all being bright and as beautiful without, as it was dull and cheerless within, Eve proposed to her aunt that they should take a walk as far as Ranby Wood.

“Do you expect to meet Mr. Selwood, Eve?” said Mrs. Glaire, rather bitterly.

The bitterness, was, however, unnoticed by Eve, who replied quietly—

“Oh no, aunt dear. I don't think there is the slightest chance of that; for don't you

remember he said he was going to dine with Doctor Purley ? ”

“ To be sure, yes ; I had forgotten,” said Mrs. Glaire, somewhat relieved ; though had she been asked she would have been puzzled to say why.

The result was that they started, leaving the town, crossing the little hill, and reaching the pleasant paths of the wood where the lichened trunks of the old oak trees were turned to russet gold in the setting sunshine, and all above seemed so peaceful and beautiful that the tears rose to Mrs. Glaire’s eyes, and she sat down upon a fallen trunk, thinking of how beautiful the world was, and how it was marred by man, through whom came the major part of the troubles that annoyed them.

“ What’s that ? ” she exclaimed, hastily, as voices in angry contention approached.

“ I don’t know, aunt,” said Eve, half rising in alarm. “ Let’s go.”

“ No one will interfere with us, child,” said

Mrs. Glaire, restraining her. "It's Squire Gray's keeper and young Maine," she continued. "Why are they quarrelling?"

"I think I know, aunt," said Eve, in an agitated voice. "Oh, surely they don't mean to fight. It is about Jessie Bultitude: for Brough, the keeper, is always going to the farm with excuses, and it annoys John Maine."

It was very evident, though, that they were going to fight, for just then the keeper, a great black-whiskered fellow in velveteens and gaiters, exclaimed.—

"Well, look here, I'll show you whether you've a raight to come across here. I 'ain't forgot about the rabbits."

As he spoke he began to strip off his coat, and his companion, a rather good-looking young fellow, whose face was flushed with passion, seemed disposed to imitate his example, when he caught sight of the ladies, and turned of a deeper red.

The keeper too resumed his coat, and whist-

ling to his black retriever, who had been showing his teeth, and seemed disposed to join in the fray, he turned off into a side path and disappeared.

“Oh, John Maine!” exclaimed Eve, reproachfully, “what would Jessie think if she saw you quarrelling with that man?”

“Beg pardon, Miss, I’m sure,” said the young man, pulling off his felt hat. “It was no seeking of mine. He’s always trying to pick a quarrel with me. He is, indeed, Mrs. Glaire; and he won’t be happy till he’s been well thrashed. But hadn’t you ladies—I mean—I beg your pardon, Miss Eve—hadn’t you better go back out of the wood?”

“No, thank you, John,” said Eve, smiling at the young man’s confusion. “We have only just come.”

“But it is getting damp, Miss,” said the young fellow, who was foreman at Bultitude’s farm.

“You didn’t think it was damp the other

night, John, when you were up here in the wood with Jessie."

"No, Miss, very true," said the young man; "but perhaps Thomas Brough will come back."

"Then," said Mrs. Glaire, quietly, "I should advise you to go back home at once, John."

"Well, if you will have it, you will," muttered the young man. "I did my best to stop it;" and with a rough salutation he went on his way.

"Eve, my dear, I should not go too often to Bultitude's," said Mrs. Glaire. "Jessie is very well, but she is rather below the station you are to take, and—quick—here, come away—this way."

She started up, and tried to drag Eve away, but she was too late; and her efforts to prevent the scene down the glade before them being seen by her young companion were in vain. For there, plainly visible in the golden glow, and framed as it were in the bower-like hazels,

stood, with their backs to them, Richard Glaire and Daisy Banks.

The young couple were as motionless as those who gazed, for in an impetuous angry way, Eve had snatched herself free, and stood looking down the glade, while Mrs. Glaire seemed petrified.

The next moment though, just as she was about to whisper hastily to Eve something about an accidental meeting, they saw Richard pass his arm round Daisy, who, nothing loth, allowed the embrace, and then as his lips sought hers, she threw her arms round his neck and responded to his caress.

It was a long cooing kiss, and it might have been longer, but as Richard Glaire drew Daisy closer to him, he slightly changed his position, and raising his eyes from the pretty flushed face he saw that they were observed, and started back with an oath.

Daisy turned wonderingly, and then, seeing who was watching them, she uttered a faint

cry, and ran off swiftly down the mossy pathway, while, after hesitating whether he should follow her or not, and with a red spot of shame burning in each cheek, Dick took out his case, chose a cigar, nibbled off the end with an affectation of nonchalance, and striking a light, began to smoke.

"I shan't turn tail," he muttered. "I'm my own master, and I shall face it out."

"Oh aunt, aunt, aunt!" moaned Eve; "is that true?"

"True! yes," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, in a low, angry voice.

"But Dick cannot—Oh aunt, aunt, take me home—take me home."

Poor Eve turned aside, sobbing bitterly, and covered her face with her hands to hide the hateful sight; but in vain, for there, as it were, standing out clear and bright before her, was Daisy Banks, with her soft, round little face and pouting lips, turned up to receive Richard Glaire's kisses; and to her it seemed so horrible,

so impossible, that she could not believe it true. It came upon her like a sudden shock, and she was stunned ; for with all Richard's ill-humour and extravagance, she could never believe him anything but true and honourable, and in her simple, trusting way, she asked herself if it was possible that there was a mistake.

"Give me your hand, child," said Mrs. Glaire, in a low, constrained voice ; and catching that of Eve, with almost angry force ; she led her on to where her son leaned nonchalantly against a tree, watching their coming.

The wood was now flooded with the rich golden sunset light, and every leaf and twig seemed turned to ruddy gold, while Dick, her young hero, the man she loved, and who was to be her husband, seemed to Eve, seen through a veil of tears, more handsome than ever she had seen him before.

And he did not love her ! His love was given to Daisy Banks ! Oh, no, she told herself ; it was not true—it was some mistake ;

and with her breath coming in sobs, and her heart beating rapidly, she clung to her aunt's hand as they approached.

Mrs. Glaire stopped short when they reached the tree, and speaking in a very cold, contemptuous way, she raised her one hand at liberty, and pointing in the direction in which one of the two actors in the little comedy had fled, she said—

“Is this my son Richard?”

“No,” said Dick, with a forced laugh, and with a display of effrontery far from in keeping with his abject looks, “No---that was Daisy Banks.”

“I say, is this my son?” exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, speaking in the same cold measured way.

“I suppose so,” said Dick, contemptuously. “There, don't make a bother out here in the wood;” and he half-turned away to gaze up towards where a thrush was loudly singing its farewell to the day.

"I say is this my son?" reiterated Mrs. Glaire, "who promised me upon his word of honour as a gentleman that he would see Daisy Banks no more."

"Oh aunt," cried Eve, with almost a shriek of pain, as these words were to her like the lifting of a veil, "did you know of this?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, sternly, "I knew, my child, that he was playing false to you, and that he was often seeing this miserable girl."

"There, let her alone," said Richard, defiantly.

"I knew it, Eve," continued Mrs. Glaire, speaking with suppressed anger; "but on my remonstrating, he promised me that it should all be at an end, and for the time, like a weak, foolish mother, I believed in his honour as a gentleman, and that he would keep his word to me and be faithful to you. You see how he keeps his word."

"There, that'll do," cried Richard, defiantly.

"I'm not going to be bullied. I like the girl, and shall marry her if I choose."

"Liar! Coward!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire. "You would not marry her: but break the miserable girl's heart, as you would break that of your cousin, if I would stand by and see you do the wrong."

"Oh no, no, no, aunt—aunt—pray don't," sobbed Eve, interposing. "You are hard upon dear Dick, aunt. He does not care for her: it is some mistake. He cannot care for her. It is Daisy's doing; the wicked girl has led him away. Dick, dear Dick, tell me, tell me, you don't love her, that—that—Oh, Dick, it can't—it can't be true."

She threw herself sobbing on his breast, but with a degree of force, hardly to be expected from her, Mrs. Glaire drew Eve away and stood between them.

"No," she exclaimed, "he shall not touch you; he shall never touch you again till this disgrace is wiped away, and he has shown

himself in some way worthy of your love ; for I will not stand by and see your future blasted by the action of a son who has proved himself a scoundrel."

"Look here, mother," cried Richard, hotly, "I'm not going to stand all this. You want me to marry Eve, and I shall marry her some day ; but if I choose to be a bit gay first I shall. I'm my own master and shall do as I like."

"Worse and worse !" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, whose voice was now an angry whisper. "Not one blush of shame—not one word of sorrow or humility before the pure, sweet, forgiving girl, whose feelings you have outraged. I ask myself again—as I could almost say, thank God your father is not alive to know it !—is this my son ?"

"There, confound your heroics !" exclaimed Richard, impatiently.

"You say I want you to marry Eve, and that some day you will," continued Mrs. Glaire. "Disabuse your mind, Richard, for I do not

wish you to marry Eve, and marry her you shall not."

"There, that'll do," cried Richard; "I've had enough of this. Here, come along with me, Evey. I'll walk home with you and explain all."

He tried to take Eve's hand, to draw through his arm, but she drew back from him, looking cold and pale, while her eyes dilated, and she shuddered slightly.

"Here, walk home with me, you little silly," he continued.

"No — no — no," said Eve, slowly, as she turned from him, and clinging to Mrs. Glaire's arm, she hid her face upon her aunt's shoulder, as in those few moments her girlhood's innocent belief and trust in her cousin passed away, and with the eyes of a woman she for the first time saw him in his true character.

"As you like," said Richard, flippantly, and assuming an injured tone. "You'll be sorry for this."

No one answered him, for Mrs. Glaire drew Eve's arm through hers, and without a word they walked hastily home.

"Damn it all!" exclaimed Richard, taking the cigar from his mouth, and throwing it impatiently down. "How cursedly unlucky. Well, I don't care: they must have known it some day. Evey will soon forget it all, and I shall easily get round the old woman with a bit of coaxing. Now where's little Daisy?"

He walked hastily down the path by which she had fled, knowing only too well that it led farther into the wood, and feeling sure that he should find her waiting for him to join her.

He was quite right, for before long he came upon her, sitting down and crying as though her heart would break.

"Hallo! little pet," he cried; and she started up in a frightened way at his words, "what have you got to cry about? I'm the one that ought to bellow. See what a wiggling I've had."

"Oh, Mr. Richard!" sobbed Daisy.

"There, *Mister* Richard again," he cried, catching her in his arms.

"Then Dick, dear Dick, there must be no more of this, I shall never be able to hold my face up in the place again."

"Stuff!" he cried, "come along."

"No, no," she sobbed. "I'm going straight home now."

"Just as you like," he said, cavalierly, and he took out his cigar-case.

"Don't be angry with me, Dick, please; for I'm so unhappy," sobbed the girl.

"You've got nothing to be unhappy about, I'm sure," he said. "It's only what I told you. The old woman won't stand it, and we shall have to make a bolt. You see it now yourself."

"Ah, but father—mother, Dick."

"They'll soon come round, like my old lady will."

"But I couldn't go, Dick, dear Dick. Do pray speak to father."

"Not I," said the young fellow, coolly.

"Then let me, pray let me."

"No, nor I shan't let you do that neither. He won't mind; and I'm not going to be talked to and patted on the back and that sort of stuff. If you love me as you say you do, you'll listen to what I say."

Daisy looked at him uneasily, and then turned away her face, sobbing to herself, "Oh, dear."

"Now then," continued Dick, "let's finish our walk."

"No, no," sobbed Daisy, "I must go back home now."

"Not yet you won't," he said, angrily.

"But indeed, indeed I must, Dick, dear Dick. Pray don't speak crossly to me."

"You get worse and worse," he said. "There's always some silly excuse ready."

"But I must—indeed I must go home now, Dick," cried Daisy, imploringly.

"And I say you shan't yet," said the young

man, half angrily, half laughing; and then—
“Curse it—there’s that Tom Podmore again,
with young Maine. Did you know he was
coming?”

“No, no: indeed no,” cried the girl, reproach-
fully.

“He’s always watching us,” cried Richard,
and catching Daisy’s arm, he walked with her
rapidly down a path leading to one of the
outlets of the wood, where they parted, Daisy
hurrying home to be received with a quiet nod
by her father, who was just going out, while
her mother looked at her curiously as she went
to take off her things.

CHAPTER III.

BANKS'S OBSTINACY.

JOE BANKS made his way straight through the place to the big house, where, on knocking at the front door, it was evident that he was expected, the girl saying quietly—

“Missus will see you in her room, Mr. Banks.”

“All raight, my lass,” said Joe; and he followed the girl into a little room off the hall, where the walls were ornamented with maps and patterns, and shelves bearing rough account books, while here and there stood a dingy-looking wooden model of some piece of machinery.

“Evening, mum,” said Joe, quietly. “I’ve come, as you sent for me; but it ain’t no use.

Things are just where they weer, and unless Master Dick comes down, the works will keep shut."

"I didn't send for you about that," said Mrs. Glaire, hastily.

"No!" said Joe, quietly.

"No," said Mrs. Glaire, clearing her throat and speaking rather excitedly. "You know I spoke to you once before, Joe Banks, about—about——"

"There, don't beat about, Missus," said Joe, with a happy smile spreading over his countenance. "I know, about Master Dick and my Daisy."

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, "and I spoke to my son about it."

"Did you?" chuckled Joe. "Well, I never spoke a word to my gal."

"I spoke to my son," continued Mrs. Glaire, "and pointed out the impossibility and impropriety of his proceedings."

"Did you, though?" chuckled Joe. "Why,

lor' a mercy, Missus, what's the good o' being so proud? Flesh and blood's flesh and blood all the world over."

"I talked to him earnestly upon the point," said Mrs. Glaire, not heeding the interruption.

"Theer, theer," said Joe, smiling. "What good was it? why did you do it?"

"And my son saw the force of my remarks, and gave me his promise that he would see Daisy no more."

"Ah, he did, did he?" chuckled Joe. "He promised you that?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, angrily; "and he has broken his promise."

"Of course he has," said Joe, chuckling. "You might ha' known it. When a young couple like them comes together, it's no use for the old uns to try and stop it. They'll manage it somehow. They're sure to be too many for you."

"Joe Banks, you put me out of patience,"

cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily. "Can you not see how important this matter is?"

"Important? Of course I do," said Joe, quietly, "a very important step for both of 'em."

"Listen!" cried Mrs. Glaire; "things are coming to a crisis, and for your sake they must be stopped."

"Strikes me," said Joe, bluntly, "that you're thinking a vast more of yourself, Missus Glaire, than of me."

"I'm thinking of the future of my son and of your daughter, Mr. Banks," said Mrs. Glaire.

"So am I," said Joe, quietly; "but you're so proud."

"I tell you, man, that I met them this evening together in the wood," cried Mrs. Glaire. "My son, with Daisy, your child, in his arms."

"Ah, you did, did you, Missus?" said Joe, chuckling. "He was kissing of her, I suppose."

"Yes," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, indignantly.

"Well, I thought as much," said Joe, quietly. "The lass had got a rare red face when I met her as she come in."

"Do you hear what I say?" cried Mrs. Glaire angrily. "I say I saw them to-night in the wood, after he had promised me to give her up."

"Oh, yes," said Joe, in a calm, unruffled way, "I heard you say so, and if you'd been in the wood every day for the past month, I'd bet you'd ha' sin 'em. They're often theer."

"Joe Banks!" cried Mrs. Glaire, half rising from her chair.

"Theer, theer, Missus, what's the good o' making a fuss, and being so proud? I've give my Daisy a good eddication, and she's quite a scholard. She can write as pretty a letter as any one need wish to see, and keeps accounts beautiful."

"Joe Banks, you are blind," cried Mrs. Glaire, passionately. "I want to save your child from shame, and you——"

“Howd hard theer—howd hard theer, Missus,” cried Joe, rising; and his rugged face flushed up. “I respect you, Missus Glaire, like a man, and I don’t wonder as it touches your pride a bit, but I won’t sit here and hear you talk like that theer. My Daisy’s as good and honest a girl as ever stepped, and I’d troost her anywheers; while, as to your son, he’s arbitrary, but you’ve browt him up as a gentleman, and do you think I’m going to believe he means harm by my darling? No, no, I know better.”

“But, you foolish man——”

“Missus Glaire, I won’t call you a foolish woman; I’ve too much respect for you; but I think so, and I think as it isn’t me as is blind, but some one else. Theer, theer, what’s the good of kicking again it. They’ve made up their minds to come together, and you may just as well let ’em by the gainest coot, as send ’em a long ways round. But, theer, Missus, don’t think like that of your own flesh and blood. Why, Missus, am

I to respect your son more than you do yoursen ? ”

“ Dick has deceived me,” cried Mrs. Glaire, with the tears running down her cheeks.

“ Well, but it won’t anser,” said Joe, calming down. “ He’s fond o’ the lass, and he was standing ’tween her and you,” he continued, smiling at his own imagery. “ You was pulling one way and she was pulling the other, and young love pulled the strongest. Of course it did, as was very natural.”

“ Will you send Daisy away, and try and stop it ? ” cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily.

“ No, I won’t do neither,” said Joe, stoutly. “ Why should I ? What call is there for me to go again my master and make my lass miserable, because you think she ain’t good enough for your boy ? ”

“ Then I must act, Joe Banks,” said Mrs. Glaire, “ for see her he shall not.”

“ Theer, theer, what can you do ? ” chuckled Joe. “ Better let things go their own way.”

"I tell you, man, that for your daughter's sake, you ought to put a stop to this."

"I can't stop it," said Joe, smiling; "nor no one else. You tried, and found you couldn't, so what could I do? Let 'em alone, and my Daisy shan't disgrace you; and look here, if it's money, I've got a thousand pounds saved up, and it's all hers. Theer!"

"Man, man, what can I say to you?" said Mrs. Glaire, checkmated by the obstinate faith of Banks in her son.

"Nowt," said Joe, sturdily; "what's the good o' talking? Take my advice, Missus Glaire—let things bide."

Mrs. Glaire wrung her hands in despair as she gazed enviously in the frank, bluff workman's face, and wished that she could feel the same calm trust in the boy who had been her sole thought for so many years, and as she gazed Joe Banks said sturdily:

"Look here, Missus, no offence meant; but they do say as marriages is made in heaven."

"Yes, Joe, marriages," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, passionately.

"Well, I weer a-talking about marriages," said Joe, quietly ; "so you take my advice and let things bide."

"You will not take my advice, Banks," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire. "But, look here, I have warned you, I have begged of you to help me, and you refuse."

"O' course I do," said Joe Banks, sturdily. "I'm not going to fight again my own flesh and blood on a question o' position. Look here," he continued, now speaking angrily, "I never was jealous of my old master's rise in life, and I stuck to him and helped him, and he made me promise to stick by and help his son ; and that I'm going to do, for I don't believe if he'd been alive he'd ha' been owt but pleased to see his boy make up to my gal. It ain't my seeking : it's Master Dick's. He loves she, and she loves he, and before I'll step 'twixt 'em, and say as one workman's son's too big

for the other workman's daughter, I'll be ——. No, I won't, not before you, Missus ; and now good night, and I wish the strike well ended."

Joe Banks swung out of the room with all the sturdy independence of a man with a thousand pounds of his own, and then made his way home, while Mrs. Glaire sat as it were stunned.

"What can I do? What can I do?" she muttered ; and then sat thinking till Eve, looking very pale and ill, walked softly into the room, and knelt by her side, turning up her sad face and red eyes to those of the troubled mother.

"Aunt, dear," she whispered, "Dick has just come in, and gone up to his room. Shall we ask him to come down to us?"

"What for?" said Mrs. Glaire sharply.

"Don't you think, Aunt, we ought to try and forgive him, and win him back?"

Mrs. Glaire rose slowly, and went to a side

table, from which she took a Prayer-book, and read from it the sentence beginning, "I will arise," to the end ; and then, laying down the book, she took Eve's head between her hands, and kissed her white forehead gently.

"Eve, my child, yes, we ought to try and forgive him ; I, for his cruel deceit of the woman who gave him birth ; you, for his outrage against the woman who was to be his wife. I will forgive him, but he must come—he must arise and come, and seek for pardon first. While you——"

"Oh, Aunt, Aunt," moaned Eve, hiding her face in the elder's breast, "I never knew before how much I loved him."

"And you forgive him, child ?"

"Yes, Aunt, I forgive," said Eve, raising her head, and looking sadly in the elder woman's face, "I forgive him, but——"

"But what, my child ?"

"All that is past now—for ever."

Mrs. Glaire did not speak for a few moments,

but stood holding her niece's hand, looking straight away from her into vacancy, while from above there floated slowly down and entered the room the penetrating fumes of the cigar Dick was smoking in his bedroom, as with his heels upon the table, and a glass of spirits and water by his side, he amused himself by reading a French novel, growling every now and then as he came across some idiom or local phrase which he could not make out, and apparently quite oblivious of the fact that three women were making themselves wretched on his behalf.

Suddenly a low whistle was heard, and Mrs. Glaire started.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

Eve made no reply, but the two women remained listening, while it seemed to them that the sound had also been heard by Dick, who apparently crossed the room, and opened his window.

"He has gone to see what it means," said

Mrs. Glaire in a whisper. "I hope the strike people are not out."

Her head was running upon certain proceedings that had taken place many years before, during her husband's lifetime, when they had literally been besieged ; but her alarm was unnecessary, for had she been in her son's bedroom, she would have seen that worthy open his window and utter a low cough, with the result that Sim Slee threw up a note attached to a stone, which the young man glanced at, and then said, "All right ; no answer," and Slee went quickly off.

Richard opened the note, glanced through it, and read passages half aloud.

"H'm, h'm. So sorry to leave you as I did. — Heart very sore. — Oughtn't to meet like that any more. — Pray let her tell father. — They would soon agree if all known. — Will not come any more to be deceitful."

"Won't you, my dear?" said Dick, aloud.
"We'll see about that. I think I can turn you

round my finger now, Miss Daisy. If not I'm very much mistaken. But we'll see."

He finished the note by twisting it up and using it to re-light his cigar, which he sat smoking, and listening as at last he heard his mother and Eve pass his room on their way to bed—the former for the first time in his life, without saying "Good night" to her son.

CHAPTER IV.

JOHN MAINE'S HEADACHE.

"HALLO, Johnny!"

"What, my lively boy."

"Look at his velveteens."

"And a silk hankercher too. Arn't he tip top?"

"Arn't you down glad to see your old mates again, Johnny?"

"Course he is; look at the tears in his eyes."

"Hey, mun, why don't you say you're glad to see us?"

"And why don't you speak?"

"Because," said John Maine, speaking slowly, as he stopped leaning on his thick staff in the middle of the road, "I'm not glad to see you, and I don't want to speak."

He looked very stern and uncompromising this young man, half bailiff, half farm servant in appearance, as he stood there in the lane, about a mile from Joe Banks's house, and facing the men who had kept up the conversational duet, for they were about as ill-looking a pair of scoundrels as a traveller was likely to meet in a day's march.

The elder of the two carried a common whip, and wore a long garment, half jacket, half vest in appearance, inasmuch as it was backed and sleeved with greasy fustian, and faced with greasy scarlet and purple plush, hanging low over his tightly-fitting cord trousers, buttoned at the ankles over heavy boots, while his head was covered with a ragged fur cap.

The younger man, whose hair was very short, wore the ordinary smock-frock euphoniously termed a "cow-gown," but as he was journeying, it was tucked up round his hips. This, with his soft wide-awake, and heavy unlaced boots, was bucolic enough, but there the rustic

aspect ceased, for his face was sallow ; he had a slovenly tied cotton handkerchief round his neck ; and as he smoked a dirty, short clay pipe, he had more the aspect of a Whitechapel or Sheffield rough than the ordinary farming man of the country.

Taking them together, they seemed to be men who could manage a piece of horse-stealing, poach, rob a hen-roost, or pay a visit night or day to any unprotected house ; and if "gaol" was not stamped legibly on each face, it was because nature could not write it any plainer than she had.

"He's gotten high in the instep, Ike," said the last man ; "and what's he got to be proud on ?"

"Ah, to be sure, what's he got to be proud on ?" chuckled the other. "He wasn't always a stuck up one, was he ?"

"I say, Johnny," said the first speaker, "keep that dog o' yourn away wilt ta, or I might give him something as wouldn't do him no good."

"Here, Top, down dog!" said the young man, and a rough-looking dog which had been snuffing round the two strangers showed his teeth a little and then lay down in the dusty road. "I don't want," continued the young man, "to be rough on men I used to know."

"Rough, lad; no, I should think not," said Ike, of the whip; and he gave it a lash, cutting off the heads of some nettles. "I knew he was all raight, Jem."

"I said," continued the young man, "that I didn't want to be surly to men as I used to know, and if you want a shilling or two to help you on the road, here they are. As for me, I've dropped all your work, and taken to getting an honest living."

"Oh, ho, ho!" laughed Ike, of the whip, giving it another flick, and making the dog jump. "Dost ta hear that, Jem?"

"Ay, lad, I hear him," said Jem, of the smock-frock, hugging himself as if afraid to lose what he considered particularly good;

"I'm hearing of him. But come along, John ; we won't be hard on such a honest old boy. Show us the way to the dram-shop, or the nearest public, and we'll talk old times over a gill or two o' yale."

"You are going one way. I'm going the other," said John Maine, uneasily, for just then Tom Podmore passed him, with big Harry, both of whom stared hard, nodded to him, and went on.

"Just hark at him, Ike," said Jem. "He's a strange nice un, he is. Why, I'm so glad to see him that if he goes off that-a-way I shall stop in Dumford and ask all about him, and where he lives and what he's a doing."

John Maine turned cold, while the perspiration stood upon his forehead, for just then Sim Slee came along in the other direction, eyed the party all over, and evidently took mental notes of what he saw.

"What is it you want of me?" said the young man, hoarsely.

"Want, lad?" said Ike; "we don't want nowt of him, do we, Jem? We're only so glad to see an old mate again, that we don't know hardly how to bear it."

"That's it, Ike," said Jem. "And don't you think as he's stuck up, mind you. See how glad he is to see his owd mates again. Say, Johnny, 'It's my delight of a shiny night,' eh?"

"Hush!" exclaimed John Maine, starting.

"All right," said Jem. "Got a pipe o' bacco 'bout you?"

John Maine took a tobacco-pouch from his pocket, and held it out to the speaker, who refilled his dirty pipe, looked the pouch all over, and then transferred it to his pocket.

"Look here, Ike," said the fellow then, "we won't keep Johnny any longer. He's off out courting—going to see his lass: Don't you see the bood in his button-hole. He'll see us again when he comes to look us up, for we shall pitch down in one of the pooblics."

“Raight you are, lad ; he’ll find us out. Do anything now, Johnny ? Ought to be a few hares and fezzans about here. Good-bye, Johnny, lad ; give my love to her.”

The two men went off laughing and talking, leaving John Maine gazing after them, till they disappeared round a bend of the lane on the way to Dumford, when brushing the perspiration from his face with one hand, he staggered away, kicking up the dust at every step till he reached a stile, upon which he sank down as if the elasticity had been taken out of his muscles. His head went down upon his hands, his elbows upon his knees, and there he remained motionless, with the dog sitting down and watching him intently, after trying by pawing and whining to gain his master’s attention.

Neither John Maine nor his ill-looking companions had gone far, before a head and shoulders were raised slowly up over the hedge, so that their owner could peer over and look

up and down the lane. The countenance revealed was that of Thomas Brough, the keeper, who had evidently been sitting on the other side, partaking of his rural lunch, or dinner; for as he parted the green growth, to get a better view, it was with a big clasp knife, while his other hand held a lump of bread, ornamented with bacon.

He spoke the next moment with his mouth full, but his words were quite audible as he said—

“I thowt that thar dog would ha’ smelt the rat, but a didn’t. So I hadn’t got you now, Jack Maine, hadn’t I? I’m a rogue, am I, Jack? I sold the Squire’s rabbuds, did I? and pocketted t’ money, did I? Wires, eh? Fezzans and hares, eh? Now, what’ll old Bultitude and Miss Jess say to this? I’ll just find out what’s your little game.”

He strode hastily off, parting the hazels, and making a short cut across the copse, while John Maine sat on the stile thinking.

What was he to do—what was he to do? Were all his struggles to be an honest man to be in vain? Yes, he had joined parties in poaching, down about Nottingham, but he had left it all in disgust, and for years he had been trying to be, and had been, an honest man. He had lived here at Dumford four years—had saved money—was respected and trusted—he was old Bultitude's head man; and now these two scoundrels—men who knew of his old life—had found him out, they would expose him, and he should have to go off right away to begin the world afresh.

“I've tried anew; I've tried very hard,” he groaned. “I left all that as soon as I saw to what it tended, and knew better; and now, after all this struggle, here is the end.”

What was the use? he asked himself; why had he tried? What were honesty and respectability, and respect to such as he, that he should have fought for them so hard, knowing that, sooner or later, it must come to this?

What should he do? The words kept repeating themselves in his brain, and he asked himself again, What?

Suppose he told them all at the farm—laid bare the whole of his early life, how he had found himself as a boy thrown amongst poachers. It had been no fault of his, for he had hated it—loathed it all. Suppose he told Mr. Bultitude—what then?

Yes, what then? Old Bultitude would say —“We're all very sorry for you here, but if it got about that I'd kept a regular poacher on my farm, what would the squire say? And what about my lease?” And Tom Brough! Good heavens, if Tom Brough should learn it all!

It was of no use; that man would blast his character gladly, and the end of it all was that he must go!

Yes, but where? Where should he go? Somewhere to work for awhile, and get on, and then live a life of wretchedness, expecting to see some old associate turn up and blast

his prospects. No; there was no hope for such as he! All he could do was to join some regiment at Lincoln or Sheffield, enlist—get on foreign service, and be a soldier. A man did not want a character to become a good soldier.

And about Jessie?

His head went lower, and he groaned aloud as this thought flashed across his mind, for his load seemed more than he could bear.

“Anything the matter, John Maine?”

The young man leaped up to find himself face to face with Mr. Selwood, whose steps had been inaudible in the dusty road, and John Maine's thoughts had been too much taken up for him to notice the whine of recognition by the dog, who had leaped up and ran forward to welcome the vicar.

“Bit of a headache, sir, bad headache—this heat, sir,” stammered the young man.

“Liver out of order—liver—not a doubt about it,” said the vicar. “What a strange

thing it is nature couldn't make a man without a liver and save him all his sufferings from bile. Come along with me to the Vicarage. I'm getting in order there now, and I'll doctor you, and go and tell Mr. Purley myself that I've been poaching on his preserves. Why, what's the matter, man?"

John Maine had started as if stung at certain of his latter words.

"Bit giddy, sir; strange and bad now it's come on," he stammered.

"That's right; you're better now. Sitting with your head down. I'll doctor you—no secrets: tincture of rhubarb, citrate of magnesia, and a little brandy. I'll soon set you right. You mustn't be ill. This is cricket night, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; but they haven't played since the strike."

"Perhaps they will to-night, and I shall come to the field. Well, come along."

"But really, sir—I—that is—"

“Now look here, John Maine, I’m the spiritual head of the parish, and you must obey me. I can’t help being a man of only your own age—I shall get the better of that. Now if I had been some silver-headed old gentleman, you would have come without a word; so come along. I’ll go back. You are decidedly ill—there’s no mistake about it.”

To John Maine’s great surprise, the vicar took his arm, and half led him back towards Dumford, chattering pleasantly the while.

“I met Mr. Simeon Slee as I came along, and he cut me dead. He’s a very nice man in his way, but I’m afraid he works so hard with his tongue, it takes all the strength out of his arms.”

“He’s strange and fond o’ talking, sir,” said John Maine.

“Yes; but words are only words after all, and if they are light and chaffy, they don’t grow like good grain. Bad thing this strike in the town, Maine. Lasted a month now.”

“Very bad, sir.”

“Ah, yes. You agricultural gentlemen don't indulge in those luxuries, and I'm glad to see that the farm people are very sober.”

“Yes, sir, 'cept at the stattice and the fair.”

“Stattice?” said the vicar, inquiringly.

“Yes, sir, status—statute-hiring, you know, when the servants leave. They call it ‘pag-rag’ day here.”

“Ha, do they?” said the vicar; “well, I suppose I shall learn all in time. What may ‘pag-rag’ mean?”

“They call it so here, sir,” said the young man, smiling. “They say a man pags a sack on his back, and I suppose it means they carry off their clothes then.”

“I see,” said the vicar; “and you have some strange characters about at such times? By the way, I saw a nice respectable couple turn in at the Bull and Cucumber, as I came by. They'd got poacher stamped on their faces plainly.—Head bad?”

"Sudden stab, sir, that's all," said John Maine, holding his hands to his head and shuddering.

"Ah, you must go back and lie down as soon as I have done with you, or else I must find you a sofa for an hour. We'll see how you are. Perhaps we'll walk home together."

"No, no, sir, I shall be all right directly. Don't do that, sir. Mr. Bultitude——"

"Mr. Bultitude has too much respect for you, John Maine, to let you go about in a state of suffering ; so just hold your tongue, sir, for you're my patient."

A few minutes after he laid his hand on the gate, with the effect of making Jacky Budd start up from his seat on the bottom of a large flower-pot, and begin vigorously hoeing at some vegetables in the now trim garden.

The vicar saw him and laughed to himself, as he led the way up to the door, glancing up the street as he did so, and seeing, with a feeling of uneasiness, that there were knots of

men standing about in conversation, as if discussing some important subject.

The door stood wide open, as if inviting entrance, and flowers were now blooming in profusion on every side, for what with the rough work of Tom Podmore and Big Harry, supplemented by the efforts of Jacky Budd and the parson himself, the garden was what the sexton called a "pictur."

"Come in here, Maine," said the vicar, opening the door of his study; and the young man followed, peering round as he did so, for this was his first visit to the vicar's dwelling, and the result of a month's residence was shown in the change that had come over the place.

But at the end of the first fortnight, one of Mr. Bultitude's waggons had been run down to the station three times to fetch "parson's traps," and "parson's traps" were visible on all sides, the Reverend Murray Selwood being, to use his own words, "rather cursed with wealth."

The place was now the *beau ideal* of a well-to-do bachelor's home. The low-roofed entrance-hall was bright with oak furniture, quaint china, trophies of old arms, and savage weapons, with flowers, for the most part sent by Mrs. Glaire, placed wherever there was light and sunshine for them to break up into long sheaves on the clean stone floor. Through an open door could be seen the dining-room, whose oaken side-board was half covered with massive plate, college cups, and trophies won by muscular arms and legs guided by a clear-thinking and solid brain ; but the study itself took John Maine's attention, with its cases full of books, great bronze clock, and vases on the mantel-piece, with statuettes on brackets.

There were traces of the owner's polished taste in every direction, but at the same time samples of his love of out-door sports. For instance, in one corner there stood a polished canoe-paddle with a fascine of fishing-rods ; in another corner a gun-case and a couple of

cricket-bats ; lying on a side-table, its handle carefully bound with string, was about the biggest croquet mallet that ever drove ball over a velvet lawn. A half-written sermon lay on the writing-table, and by it a cigar-box ; while on the chimney-piece and in brackets were pipes, from the humble clay, through briars, to the tinted brown meerschaum with its amber tube. The greatest incongruity in the place, however, seeing that it was the snugger of a man of peace, was a trophy of single-sticks, foils, masks and gloves, crossed by a couple of bows, in front of which were a sheaf of arrows and two pairs of boxing-gloves.

“Looking at the gloves, Maine ?” said the vicar, smiling. “Ah, I used to be a bit of a don with those at one time. You and I will put them on together some day. Just touch that bell.”

John Maine obeyed, while the young vicar found his keys, and opened a cabinet which was in two compartments, the one displaying

a regular array of medicines, the other spirits, wine, and glasses.

“Bring in some water, Mrs. Slee,” said the vicar.

“And a sponge and a rag and the ragjack oil?” said Mrs. Slee, eagerly.

“No, Mrs. Slee. It’s medicine, not surgery to-day;” and the woman backed out, looking a little less angular and sad than a few weeks before.

“I’m a regular quack, Maine, you see,” said the vicar, smiling, as he poured into a great soda-water glass a certain quantity of tincture, added to it a couple of table-spoonfuls of brandy, and so much granulated magnesia, to which, when Mrs. Slee returned, he poured about half a pint of pure cold well water. “There’s a dose for you, my man,” he said, as he passed it to John Maine, “that will set you right in an hour. Now, Mrs. Slee, any one been?”

“Yes, Bulger’s girl’s been here with a bottle

for some wine," said Mrs. Slee shortly, for "sir" and a respectful tone were still strangers to her tongue.

"Bring the bottle in. Any one else?"

"Maidens's boy says you promised his mother some tea."

"So I did," said the vicar, opening a large canister, from which he took a packet which scented the room with its fragrance. "There it is. Now then, who else?"

"Old Mumby's wife has come for some more wine."

"Then she'll go back without it, Mrs. Slee. Do you see that?" he continued, giving her a strange look; "that's the peculiar sign that used to be in vogue amongst the ancients. That's the gnostic wink, Mrs. Slee, and means too much. I won't send a spoonful. That wicked old woman drank every drop of the last herself, Mrs. Slee, I'll make affidavit. She wouldn't stir across the room to wait on her poor old husband, and yet she'll come nearly a

mile to fetch that wine. I'll take it myself, and give it the poor old boy, and see him drink it before I come away. Tell her I'll bring it down, Mrs. Slee; but don't say I called her a wicked old woman."

"Oh, I'm not going to chatter. Do you think I should be such a ghipes?" said Mrs. Slee, rudely.

"Not knowing what a ghipes is, I cannot say, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar; "but you are not perfect, Mrs. Slee—not perfect. Soup. You have that last soup on your conscience!"

"Well, I'm sure I should ha' been glad on a few not long back, and it was quite good enew to gie away to people."

"And I'm sure it was not, Mrs. Slee: the poor people are hungry, and want food. This strike's a terrible thing."

"Then they shouldn't strike," growled Mrs. Slee.

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Slee, so I don't give soup to the men who did strike; but

the women and children did not strike, and if you knew what it was to be hungry—— I beg your pardon, Mrs. Slee,” he added hastily, as he saw his housekeeper flush up. “There, I did not think. But this soup. We had a capital French cook at my college, and he gave me lessons. I’m a capital judge of soup, and I’ll taste the fresh. Bring me in a basin, and send these people away.”

Mrs. Slee muttered and went out, looking rather ungracious, and the vicar turned to his guest, who was fidgetting about and seemed rather uneasy.

“I’m rather proud of our soup here at the vicarage—broth, the people call it,” said the vicar.

“I’ve heerd tell of it, sir,” said John Maine, who wanted to go.

“But I have hard work to keep the water out. I always tell Mrs. Slee that the people can add as much of that as they like. But, I say, Maine, there’s something wrong with you !”

"Oh, no, sir ; nothing at all, sir ; but it's time I was going, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Well, well, good-bye, Maine. I hope," he added significantly, "your head will be better. Mind this, though, I'm not one of the confessional parsons, and insist upon no man's confidence ; but bear this in mind, I look upon myself as the trusted, confidential friend of every man in the parish. I shall be over your way soon."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Maine. "I know you do," and, backing out, the next moment he was gone.

"Strange young man that—strange people altogether," said the vicar. "Oh, here's the soup." G

For just then Mrs. Slee bustled in with a napkin-covered tray, bearing a basin and spoon, the former emitting clouds of steam.

The vicar took the basin, sat down, stirred it, smelt it, tasted it, and replaced the spoon, while Mrs. Slee watched his face eagerly.

“Wants another pinch of salt, and another dash of pepper. Fetch them, Mrs. Slee, and some bread.”

Mrs. Slee, looking as ungracious as ever, but with an eagerness which she could not conceal, hurried out to return with the required articles, when more salt was added and a dash of pepper. Then a slice of bread was cut from the home-made loaf, and the vicar tasted—tasted again, and then, in the calmest and most unperturbed manner possible, went on partaking of the soup, every mouthful being watched with intense eagerness by the woman waiting for his judgment.

“Capital soup this, Mrs. Slee ; capital brew !”

Mrs. Slee did not smile, as the vicar diligently hunted the last grains of rice in the bottom of the basin with his spoon, but she gave a sigh of satisfaction.

“This will go off like a shot. How much have you got of it ? Almost equal to our soup at Boanerges.”

"There's about sixty quarts of it, sir."

"Sixty? Not half enough. You'll have to start the copper again directly, Mrs. Slee. Ah, by the way, Bailey will bring two hundred loaves this evening, and we'll give them away with the soup in the morning."

"Two hundred loaves!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee. "Bless the man, where am I to put them?"

"Oh, we'll stack them in the hall if we can't put them anywhere else, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, laughing. "And let that soup cool. It'll be like jelly in the morning. I'm going to walk over to Bultitude's, and I'll call at the butcher's about the beef."

"But that broth would bear as much watter to it, and that would make twice as much."

"Now, Mrs. Slee, I won't have a good thing spoiled," said the vicar. "I don't believe you mind the trouble of making it."

"That I'm sure I don't," said Mrs. Slee, sharply; "only you're giving away cartloads of

bread and meat, and pailsful of soup to folks as wean't say thank you for it, and laugh at you for your pains."

"They won't laugh at me while they're eating that beautiful soup, Mrs. Slee, which does you credit. If they like to laugh afterwards,—well, let them."

"Oh, I don't want no praise for the broth," said Mrs. Slee, ungraciously. "You telled me how to mak' it. But I don't like to see you robbing yourself for them as is sure to be ungrateful."

"We won't mind that, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, smiling; "and now I'm going off to Bultitude's, and I'll see if I can't get there this time. By the way, Mrs. Slee, I should like a little tureen of that soup for my dinner; it's splendid. And look here, Mrs. Slee, if any one comes while I'm out, who needs a little, you can lend a jug, and give some of the soup before it's cold. I'll leave that to you."

CHAPTER V.

THE VICAR'S SOUP.

"HE's a strange good man," said Mrs. Slee, grimly, as she watched the vicar down the path; "and he must hev a vast o' money, giving away as he is raight and left. Well, I won't hev him cheated if I can help it, for the more he gives the more he may. Who's yon at the back?"

The last remark was jerked out as a soft tap was heard at the kitchen door, and on going to answer it, there stood Sim Slee.

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Didn't I tell thee as thou needn't come here?" said Mrs. Slee. "I thowt you wouldn't darken parson's door again."

"What's that as smells?" said Sim, giving a sniff.

"Soup for them as you and your strike folk have left to pine to dead," snapped Mrs. Slee.

"Is that some on it in they pancheons?" said Sim.

"Yes, it is," said his wife, sulkily.

"I heered tell on it," said Sim. "He've been a scrattin about at all the butchers', and buying up weighs of cag mag as they couldn't sell. I saw a basket o' stinking bones come up to the gate, and I heerd at the Bull as he's gotten four beasts' heads promised. Yah! it's a shame as such as him should hev a place like this, and five hundred a year."

"Thou fulsome!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee, angrily. "I wean't stand by and hear parson talked about like that."

"All raight," said Sim, sneering; "he's won you ower then. But what hev you gotten to eat?"

"Nowt," said Mrs. Slee, shortly.

“Here, just take thee scithers, and coot the dwiny ends off my collar,” said Sim, holding up the ragged but scrupulously clean collar of the shirt he wore ; and this duty was diligently performed by his wife.

“Some one telled me as the soup meat was covered wi’ maddick bees,” said Sim, as soon as the task was done.

“Then some one telled thee a lie,” said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

“Power up a few of it in a basin,” said Sim, after examining the broad earthen pans in which the thick soup steamed. “Let’s see what sorter stuff the down-trodden serf is to be compelled to eat.”

“It isn’t good enough for such as thou,” said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

Sim took up the spoon, and with an air of disgust raised some of the soup and let it drop back, exhaling as it did so a most tantalising odour for a hungry man.

“I just come by Riggall’s, the bone-setter’s,”

said Sim ; “ and he says as he won't hev parson meddling wi' his trade, if doctor does. Why, he tied up Binney Mawtrop's hand as he got in the wheel.”

“ Yes, and I held a basin and a sponge for him,” said Mrs. Slee, eyeing her husband. “ He owt to hev let him bleed to dead, of course.”

“ Say, owd lass,” said Sim, “ is this stuff fit to yeat ? ”

“ Fit to yeat, thou unconditioned fulsome ! it ain't fit for thee. Bread and watter's what such shacks as thou ought to hev, and nowt besides.”

“ Thy tongue's gotten a strange and rough edge to it this morning, moother,” said Sim, grinning, and longing to convey the spoon to his mouth, but feeling that it would not be consistent.

“ There, sit thee down,” said Mrs. Slee. “ I know what you mean. There, sit down, and don't get theeing and thouing me about. A deal you care for me.”

This was in answer to a rough caress, as she bustled about, and got a basinful of the soup for her lord, with a great hunk of bread ; and without more ado Sim took his seat.

“ Oh, I’m not going to yeat this,” he said. “ I’m just going to taste what sorter mooock he gives the pore out of his bounty.”

“ Howd thee tongue and eat,” said Mrs. Slee, contemptuously.

Sim played with the spoon, and splashed the soup about, ending by tasting it and retasting, and then taking some bread and going heartily to work.

“ Say, mooother,” he exclaimed, “ it won’t do ; that’s the broth you’ve been makking for the parson hissen. It ain’t to give away.”

“ That’s made o’ the meat as the parson went and scratted up from the butcher’s, and the baskets o’ bones and beasts’ heads, and all the rubbish he could get together,” said Mrs. Slee sourly.

“ I’ll say it’s good soup,” said Sim, finishing

his basin. "Say, moother, give's another soop."

"He said I was to give some to anybody who wanted," said Mrs. Slee; and then, with a grim smile, she refilled his basin, while Sim drew out his handkerchief, spread it on his knees, and polished off the second basin in a very few minutes.

"You can't get me to believe as that soup's going to be gin away," he said as he rose. "That'll be wattered till it's thin as thin. Theer, I'm off again. I've a deal to see to;" and without another word he hurried away.

"Yes, he's gotten his fill," said Mrs. Slee, directing a look of contempt after her husband; but as she crossed the kitchen she saw something white under the chair Sim had occupied, and stooping down picked up a note in a very small envelope, whose address she spelled out:

"Miss Banks,

By hand."

"What's he gotten to do wi' takkin letters

to Daisy Banks?" she exclaimed, as a hot feeling of jealousy came upon her for the moment. Then, with a half-laugh she said, "No, no, it ain't that: he's too old and unheppen, and she's ower young and pretty. He's takkin it for some one. Whose writing will it be? He's coming back."

She stopped short, hearing a step, and darted out of the kitchen just as Sim came softly up, peered in and looked eagerly about the floor and under the table.

"Mebbe I've dropped it somewheers else," he muttered, starting off again, while Mrs. Slee had another good look at the letter, and ended by depositing it in her bosom.

"I'll give it to parson," she said at last, and then resumed her work.

Meanwhile, Murray Selwood was retracing his steps on the way to Bultitude's farm, but before he reached the place he came upon John Maine once more, looking eagerly across the fields.

“Well, Maine, how's the head?” said the vicar, making the young man start, for the grass had deadened his tread. “What can you see—game?”

“I'm afraid it is, sir,” said the young man, bluntly—“the sportsman and the hare.”

“H'm!” ejaculated the vicar, as he caught sight of two figures on the hill-side, far distant; but the day was so beautifully clear that he could make out Richard Glaire and a companion. “Mr. Glaire and his cousin?” he said hastily.

“No, sir,” said the young man, quietly, “that's what it ought to be. It's Mr. Richard Glaire and one of the town girls. I think it's Daisy Banks. Do you know him well, sir?”

“Yes, pretty well,” said the vicar, eyeing the young man's saddened face intently.

“Well, sir, it's no business of mine,” said the young fellow; “but if I was a friend of Mr. Richard Glaire, I should tell him to keep at home, and not do that; for the men are

getting hot again him, and he may fall into trouble."

"John Maine, if any violence is intended against Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, "I wish you to tell me at once."

"I don't know of any, sir," said Maine, "only Tom Podmore's dreadfully put out about Daisy Banks, and the strike people are growing more bitter every day. If I do hear of anything, sir, I'll tell you."

They came directly upon old Bultitude, looking bluff and ruddy in his velveteens and gaiters.

"Ah, parson, fine day! how are you? What's the matter?"

"Well, Maine here isn't well," said the vicar.

"What's wrong, lad? Why, thou said'st nowt when you came in a bit ago."

"Oh, it's nothing, sir, nothing," said John Maine, hastily.

"Let him go and lie down for an hour," said

the vicar, looking at the young man's ghastly face.

"Not got fever, hev you, my lad?" said the old gentleman kindly, as they walked up to the house. "Here, Jess, pull down the blinds in the far room, and let John Maine come and lie down a bit theer."

At his summons, Jessie's young, pleasant face appeared at the window. It had no more pretensions to beauty than a pair of soft, dark eyes, and a bright, rosy colour, and the eyes looked very wistfully at John Maine, who now made an effort.

"No, no, sir," he said. "I won't lie down. I'll get to work again; there's nothing like forgetting pain."

"Well, perhaps you're right, Maine," said the vicar. "Well, Mr. Bultitude, we don't get over our strike."

"Parson, it makes me wild," said the old man. "I can't bear it, and I shall be glad—strange and glad to see it over; for I hate to

see a pack of men standing about the town doing o' nowt. Can't you do owt wi' the works people?"

The vicar shook his head.

"I've tried both ways—hard," he said; "master and men, but no good comes of it."

While this conversation was going on, Jessie had stepped anxiously forward, and laid her hand upon John Maine's arm.

"Is anything serious the matter, John?" she said anxiously. "Are you very ill?"

He started when she touched him as if he had been stung, and withdrew his arm hastily; and then, without so much as a glance at the girl's earnest, appealing eyes, he turned away and followed the vicar down the path, for he had shaken hands and parted from the farmer.

"I'll see you across the home close, sir," said John Maine.

"Thank you, do," said the vicar; "but I think your bull pretty well knows me now. Hallo! here comes Mr. Brough, the Squire's

keeper, with his black looks and black whiskers. He always looks at me as if he thought I had designs on the squire's game. Hallo ! Maine, bad friends ? What does that mean ?" he continued, as the man gave him a surly salute and then passed on, gun over shoulder, bestowing upon the young bailiff a sneering, half-savage look that was full of meaning.

"Tom Brough has never been very good friends with me, sir, since I thrashed him for annoying Miss Jessie there, up at the farm."

"Seems as if his love has not yet returned," said the vicar, as he strode away, thinking of the various little plots and by-plots going on in his neighbourhood ; and then sighing deeply as he felt that there was trouble in store for himself, in spite of his stern discipline and busy efforts to keep his mind too much employed to think of the countenance that haunted his dreams.

It seemed to be the vicar's fate to appear as playing the spy upon Richard Glaire, for, on

his return, taking a round-about way back, so as to make a call upon one or two people whom he had relieved of some part of the suffering induced by the strike, he was once more striking for the High Street, when he heard the words sharply uttered :

“ Well, I’ll pay you this time ; but let me find that you fail me again and don’t you expect—— Confound—— ! ”

“ How do, Mr. Glaire,” said the vicar, for he had come suddenly upon Richard, laying down the law pretty sharply to Sim Slee, and he was close to them before it was seen on either side.

“ Really,” said the vicar to himself as he strode on, “ I’ve not the slightest wish to see what that unfortunate young man does ; but it seems to me that I am to be bound to bear witness to a great deal. Heigho ! these are matters that must be left to time.”

He entered his own gate soon after, and having received Mrs. Slee’s report, that lady handed him the note she had found.

“Mr. Glaire’s hand,” he said, involuntarily and with his brows knit. “Where did you get this?”

“My master came to see me, and he must ha’ dropped it,” said Mrs. Slee.

“Then take it to him,” said the vicar, quietly, as he resumed his calm aspect. “It is nothing to do with us.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Mrs. Slee, sharply. “What call has young master Dick Glaire to be writing letters to she?”

“Take the letter to your husband, Mrs. Slee,” said the vicar, quietly; and then left alone, he threw himself into his chair, and covered his face with his hands, trying hard to resist temptation, for he knew well enough that if he had kept that letter and dishonourably shown it to Eve Pelly, so serious a breach would be created that his future success would be almost certain. But, no; he could not stir a step to make her unhappy. She loved this man, who was quite unworthy of

her ; and if she ever was awakened from her dream his must not be the hand that roused her.

He started as he heard the door close loudly, and saw Mrs. Slee go down the path to seek out her husband, and return the letter.

There was time now to call her back, but he did not move, only sat and watched her bear away that which he knew might have been used as the lever to overthrow Richard Glaire.

Once only did he hesitate, but it was when his thoughts reverted to Daisy Banks and the possibility of ill befalling her, through her intimacy with Richard Glaire.

“ But I cannot take action on a letter that falls accidentally into my hands,” he said. “ If I speak to the girl’s father it must be on the subject of what I have seen ; and that I will do.”

He gave the matter a little consideration, and then determined to act at the risk of being considered a meddler, and walked straight to

Joe Banks's pleasant little home, where he found Mrs. Banks and Daisy alone, the girl being in tears.

He was turning back, so as to avoid being present during any family trouble, when Mrs. Banks arrested him.

“Don't you go away, sir, please, for I should like you to have your word with this girl as well as me. It's no use to speak to her father and——Hoity-toity, miss.”

Poor Daisy did not stop to hear the rest ; for already growing thin with worry and mental care connected with her love affair, Mrs. Banks was leading her rather a sad life in her husband's absence, ostensibly to benefit Tom Podmore, but really hardening the girl's heart against him, if she had felt any disposition to yield : she now started up to hide her tears, and ran out of the room.

“Well, that's fine manners, miss !” exclaimed Mrs. Banks, apostrophising the absent one. “I'm always telling her and

Joe, my husband, sir, that no good can come of her listening to young Master Dick Glaire."

"Then you don't approve of it, Mrs. Banks?" said the vicar, quietly.

"Approve of it, sir? No, nor anybody else, except her foolish father, who's the best and kindest man in the world: only when he takes an obstinate craze there's no turning him."

The vicar found the matter already to his hand, and was spared the trouble of introducing the subject; but he would rather have found Joe Banks present.

Does he approve of it?" he said, quietly.

"Approve of it, sir! yes. I tell him, and all his neighbours tell him, that it's a bit of foolish vanity; but they can't turn him a morsel."

"Hallo, moother," said Joe Banks, entering the room, "can't you let that rest?"

"No, Joe, and I never shall," exclaimed Mrs. Banks.

"Don't you tak' any notice, sir," said Joe. "She heven't talked you round, hev she?"

"No, Mr. Banks," said the vicar, quietly ; "it was not necessary. I have no right to interfere in these matters, but——"

"Well, speak out, sir ; speak out," said Joe, rather sternly. "Say out like a man what you mean."

"If I did, Mr. Banks, I should say that you were imprudent to let this matter proceed."

"Why?"

"Because it is a well-known fact that Mr. Glaire is engaged to his cousin."

"There, Joe ; there, Joe ; what did I tell thee ?" cried Mrs. Banks, triumphantly ; while Daisy, who could hear nearly all that was said, crouched with burning face in her room, shivering with nervous excitement, though longing to hear more.

"All raight, parson, I know," said Joe ; "I see. The missus has sent you."

"Indeed, no, Banks," said the vicar. "I speak as a friend, without a word from anybody."

“Then, what do you mean by it?” cried Joe, exploding with passion. “What raight have you to come interferin’ in a man’s house, and about his wife and daughter? This is my own bit o’ freehold, Mr. Selwood, and if you can’t pay respect to me and to mine, and see that if Master Richard Glaire, my old fellow-workman’s boy, chooses to marry my gal, he’s a raight to, why I’d thank you to stay away.”

“Don’t be angry with me, Mr. Banks,” said the vicar, laying his hand upon the other’s arm; “I indeed wish you and yours well.”

“Then keep to wishing,” said Joe sharply. “I’m not an owd fool yet. Think I don’t know? Here’s the Missus, and Missus Glaire, and Tom Podmore, all been at you; and ‘All raight, leave it to me,’ says you. ‘I’ll put it all raight.’ And now you’ve had your try, and you can’t put it raight. I’ll marry my gal to anybody I like and she likes, in spite of all the parsons in Lincolnshire.”

“Don’t you tak’ any notice of what he says,

sir, please," cried Mrs. Banks. "He's put out, and when he is, and it's about something that he knows he's wrong over——"

"No, he isn't," roared Joe.

"He says anything, sir," continued Mrs. Banks.

"No, he don't," roared Joe. "He's a saying raight, and what he says is, that he won't be interfered wi' by anyone. He's got trouble enew ower the strike, and he won't hev trouble ower this ; so perhaps Mr. Selwood 'll stop away from my place till he's asked to come again."

"Joe, you ought to be ashamed of yoursen," cried Mrs. Banks. "He'll come and beg your pardon for this, sir, or I'll know the reason why."

"No, he wean't," roared Joe. "So now go ; and if you hadn't been such a straightforward chap ower the row again Master Richard, I'd hev said twice as much to you."

"Yes, I'll go," said the vicar quietly. "Good day, Mrs. Banks. Good day, Banks ; you'll

find I'm less disposed to meddle than you think, and give me credit for this some day. Come, you'll shake hands."

"Dal me if I will," cried Joe.

"Nonsense, man ; shake hands."

"I wean't," roared Joe, stuffing his hands in his pockets, and turning his back.

"Well, Mrs. Banks, you will," said the vicar ; and then, as he went away, he said :

"Mrs. Banks, and you, Mr. Banks, please recollect this : I shall forget all these words before I get home ; so don't either of you think that we are bad friends, because we are not ; and you, Mr. Banks, you are of too sterling stuff not to feel sorry for what you have said."

"There, it wean't do," roared Joe ; "I wean't be talked ower ;" but the vicar hardly heard his words, for he was striding thoughtfully away.

CHAPTER VI.

BY THE CHALK PIT.

THOUGH Sim Slee had omitted on two occasions to convey letters to Daisy Banks making appointments for meetings in different parts of the country walks round Dumford, Daisy had had a pretty good supply of messages; and feeling as it were compelled to obey, she had gone on more than one occasion with sinking heart, to return with aching eyes, whose lids looked swollen and red with weeping.

For the girl was simply wretched, and time after time she looked back to the days when her heart was whole, and as she threw herself wearily on her bed she sobbed herself again and again to sleep, wishing that her very life were ended; the deceit she was obliged to practise, the anger of her mother, and the

open sneers and inuendos of neighbours wounding her so that the smart was almost more than she could bear.

Whether Dick chose east, west, north, or south for the appointment, poor Daisy could never get out of the town without encountering some one to give her a peculiar look, more than once driving the poor girl to make pretence of calling at some place that she did not want to visit, and as often turning her back home, making Richard Glaire, who had been kept waiting and "fooled," as he called it, write her the cruellest and most angry letters, some even of a threatening nature.

It happened one evening that poor Daisy, who had broken faith the night before, was going slowly up the High Street, with a basket on her arm, as if bound on some marketing expedition, when it seemed as if it was impossible that she could get to her trysting place, where she knew that Dick must have been waiting for an hour.

First the landlord of the Bull was standing at his door smoking, and he gave a sneering nod, which seemed to say, "I know where you are going, my lass."

A little further on sat Miss Purley, at her window, ready to put up her great square, chased gold eye-glass, and stare at the blushing girl with all the indignant force of thirty-nine tinged yellow, against nineteen of the freshest pink.

Again a little further, and she came suddenly upon Eve Pelly, who came from the big house, started, stopped, caught her hands, ejaculating "Oh, Daisy!" and then breaking down, turned suddenly away and re-entered the house.

To her horror, poor Daisy found that this meeting had been witnessed by Miss Primgeon, the lawyer's sister, who was seated at her window, staring as hard as she could.

Not twenty yards farther on there stood Tom Podmore, leaning against a corner of a

lane, also watching her ; but as she approached he turned away without a word.

It was almost unbearable, and now a feeling of anger began to rise in Daisy's bosom, making her pant, and flush up, as she determined to go on at all hazards.

Jane Budger, who kept the little beer-house, and knew all the gossip of the place, which she retailed with gills of ale to her customers, saw her, stared, or rather squinted at her, and moved her hands as she exclaimed :

“ Yes, my dear, I know where you are agate for to-night.”

Then there seemed a peculiar meaning in the innocent remark of one neighbour who met her in the street, and observed that the stones were “ strange and slape.” So it was with another a little higher up, who remarked that the road was “ very clatty.”

Next she met Big Harry in the muddiest part of the main street, and he exclaimed to her :

“Saay, lass, it's solid soft.”

A little farther on she passed the druggist's, where the great bottle of the trophies of his dental work seemed to grin at her in a ghastly way, for it was three parts full of extracted teeth.

Again a little further, and as she was passing Riggall's, the bone-setter's, his ghastly sign over his front door, of a skull and cross-bones, made her shudder ; for it seemed to tell her of the goal to which she was steering, and so affected her, that outside the town in the winding road, she sat down shivering upon the mile-stone, crying as though her heart would break.

“What shall I do ! What shall I do !” she sobbed, when she started up with a faint shriek, for a light hand was laid upon her shoulder.

“Miss Eve !” she cried, on seeing the pale tearless girl before her.

“Yes, Daisy, it is I,” said Eve. “I want to speak to you. Let us walk on together.”

“No, no, Miss Eve. No, no, dear ; not that way.”

“Is Dick waiting for you up there ?” said Eve, huskily.

“Don’t ask me, Miss ; don’t ask me, please,” cried Daisy, imploringly, as they walked down a side lane.

“I thought he was,” said Eve, speaking in a very low deep voice, as if her emotion was stifling her. “I followed you to speak to you.”

“You’ve been following and watching me,” cried Daisy, with a burst of passion. “You all do ; everybody watches me. What have I done that I should be so cruelly used ? I wonder some one don’t want to put me in prison.”

“Daisy !” cried Eve, hoarsely, as she caught her by the wrist, “what have I done to you that you should have been so cruel and treacherous ?”

“I haven’t been,” cried Daisy, with a burst of pettish sobs.

"Have I not always been kind and affectionate to you?"

"Yes, yes; I know that," cried Daisy.

"And you reward me by trying to rob me of my promised husband."

"I didn't, I didn't," sobbed Daisy. "I didn't want to; but he was always following me, and hunting me, and worrying me."

"Daisy, Daisy!" cried Eve, with a passionate cry, as she threw herself on her knees to the homely girl, "give him back to me; oh, give him back."

"Miss Eve! Miss Eve!" cried the girl, startled at the vehemence and suddenness of this outburst, "oh, do please get up. What can I do?"

"Oh, Daisy, you'll break my heart. You'll kill poor aunt. What have we done, that you should come like a blight upon us?"

Eve rose slowly and stood facing the girl, over whom a change seemed to be coming as she said sulkily:

“It wasn’t my doing.”

“But you must have led him on,” moaned poor Eve. “You, who are so bright and pretty, while I—while I—”

Daisy gave her now a jealous, vindictive look, as if she felt danger; and that this gentle girl was about to rob her of the man she loved, and she exclaimed:

“I must go. I won’t stop to be scolded. You want to win him back; but he belongs to me.”

“Daisy, Daisy!” cried Eve, catching at her shawl; but it was too late—the girl had turned and run back into the road, hastening on to the place where she was to have found Richard Glaire, up by the chalk pit; and as she hastened on, she would not look back. Still poor Eve followed her sadly as far as the road, and then turned back towards the town, saying sadly:—

“I could not move her. It is too late, too late.”

Long before Eve Pelly had reached the town, with its knots of men out of work, Daisy had climbed the hill to the chalk pit, where Richard was waiting, smoking angrily.

"At last!" he cried. "I was just going back."

He gave a glance round, and was about to throw his arms round the flushed and panting girl, when he started back, and stood staring, as Mrs. Glaire came slowly forward from amongst the trees, and taking Daisy's wrist in her hand, she pointed down the road.

"There, you can go back," she said, quietly. "I wish to speak to Daisy Banks."

"No, no, Richard —— Dick, dear, don't leave me with her; she'll kill me!" screamed Daisy, frightened by the pale, resolute-looking little woman, who held her so tightly.

"Silence, child!" cried Mrs. Glaire.

"Oh, come, let's have an end of this," cried Richard.

"I intend to try for an end," said Mrs.

Glaire, sharply, "for with you I can make no compact that will not be broken."

"Oh, if it's coming to that," said Richard, sharply, "I shall bring matters to an end."

"Go, sir! Go home," said Mrs. Glaire, sternly.

"Come, you needn't bully that poor girl," said Dick, with a half laugh; then seeing the hand still pointing down the road, he grew uneasy, fidgeted, and ended by saying—"There, just as you like."

"Dick, don't leave me," gasped Daisy.

"Don't you be a little silly," laughed Richard. "She won't hurt you. I say, mother, you'd better make matters up with Daisy and bring her home, for I think I shall marry her after all."

"Don't, don't leave me, Dick," whispered Daisy, straining to reach him; but her wrist was tightly clasped, and she sank shivering on the bank by the deep chalk pit, whose side was separated from the lane by a low post and

rail fence, beyond which the descent was a sheer precipice of seventy or eighty feet, the old weakened side being dotted with flowers ; a place which, as she stood holding Daisy's wrist still tightly and watching her son till he disappeared down the road, Mrs. Glaire remembered to have been a favoured spot in her girlhood for gathering nosegays ; and where, more than once, she had met her dead husband in the happy days of her own courtship.

As these thoughts came back from the past, a feeling of pity for the poor girl beside her stole into Mrs. Glaire's heart, and she trembled in her purpose ; but after a few moments' indecision, she told herself that it was for the happiness of all, and that Daisy Banks must suffer in place of Eve.

The stars were beginning to peer out faintly and the glow in the west was paling ; but still she stood holding the wrist tightly ; while, after making a few energetic efforts to free herself, Daisy submitted like a trapped bird, and

crouched there palpitating, and not daring once to raise her eyes to those of the angry mother of the man she believed she loved ; but who had at all events obtained so strong a hold upon her that she was forced to submit her will to his, and obey his every command.

CHAPTER VII.

AT HOME.

“Two can play at that game,” said Richard to himself, as he walked sharply down the hill and back into the town, where, not heeding Eve, who was in the dining-room, he hastily wrote a short letter, and then putting on his hat, went out again, smoking a cigar, apparently to have a stroll, and sauntered down towards the Bull and Cucumber, where he gave a long, low whistle, uttered twice, and then walked on for some distance.

His signal had the required effect, for Sim Slee came after him with a soft pace like a cat, and together the two men went on in the darkness, Richard talking earnestly to his com-

panion, and passing money to him, whose chink was very audible.

“Now you quite understand?” said Richard, earnestly.

“Understand? He, he, he!” chuckled Sim. “I’ve got it quite by heart. I say, won’t Joe Banks be popped?”

“Hold your tongue, and keep names quiet. Now you quite understand. I shall not show my face in the matter at all.”

“Oh, no, of course not,” said Sim. “All right, Mr. Glaire, sir. You couldn’t have a troostier man than me.”

“I don’t know,” said Richard; “perhaps I oughtn’t to have given you the money till after.”

“Oh, you may troost me, Mr. Richard, I’m square, sir, and honourable. It’ll all be done lovely.”

“Then I shall not see you again,” said Richard; and they parted.

“Ho, ho, ho!” chuckled Sim, slapping his

legs. "Here's a game. Some on 'em 'll be chattering all over the place 'bout this, and, ho, my!"

He had another long enjoyable laugh, to start up half frightened, for a dark figure approached him so suddenly, that it was close upon him before he was aware of the fact.

"What are you laughing at?" said the new-comer, sharply. "What devil's game hev yow and that Dick Glaire been hatching?"

"Hatching? Devil's game, Tom Podmore? why, can't a man laugh in the lane if he likes? But there, I'm off up to the mill, for it'll reean to-night, mun."

Tom Podmore strode off after Richard Glaire, muttering angrily, and on getting close to the town, it was to see the young man walking right in the middle of the road, to avoid the men standing about on the pebble-paved side-walks.

It was well he did so, for there were plenty of hands ready to be raised against him, and

had one struck at him, it would have been the signal for a rain of blows : for scores of men in the place were now vowing vengeance against the man whom they accused of starving their wives and bairns. In fact, it had so far been Richard Glaire's insolent temerity that had saved him from assault. He had gone boldly about, urged thereto by his eagerness to meet little Daisy Banks, but for which engagements he would probably have stayed indoors, and run greater risks on the few occasions when he showed himself.

As it was, he hastened his steps this night, on seeing the dark groups about, and when Tom Podmore closed up, he almost ran the last few steps, dashed open the door, and, closing it, stood panting in the hall.

It was about half-past ten now, and he listened, with his hand upon the bolt, to the muttering voices without for a few minutes, till one of the maids came in to gaze at him curiously.

"Here, fasten up this door," he said harshly.

"Fasten the door, sir?" said the girl.

"Yes, fasten the door, stupid," he cried, angrily.

"But missus hasn't come in yet," said the girl.

"Not come in?" said Richard, starting as he recalled where he had left her; and then, with a hasty pish! "I daresay she's at Purley's. I'll fasten the door. Don't sit up."

The girl was leaving the hall, when he called after her:

"Where's Miss Eve?"

"Gone to bed, sir, with a sick headache."

"She's always got a sick headache," growled Richard.

"I wish you had 'em your sen," muttered the girl.

"There, bring some hot water and a tumbler into the dining-room," said Richard, as the girl was turning to go.

He went into the dining-room, got out the

spirit-stand, and, on the hot water being brought, mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy and water, and drank it rapidly, listening occasionally to the footsteps and loud talking without.

A second glass followed shortly after, and then, tired out with the day's work, the young man threw himself on the sofa. The sounds outside by degrees grew indistinct and distant, and then, with a pale, ghost-like Eve following him always, he was journeying through foreign lands with Daisy, who looked lovingly up in his face. Then, Tom Podmore seemed to be pursuing him and threatening his life. Next it was the vicar ; and then, at last, after struggling hard to get away, Joe Banks stood over him with a flashing light, and as he waited to hear him say, " Where is my child ? " —waited with a feeling of suspense that seemed prolonged for years, the voice said coldly and sternly :

" Why are you not in bed ? "

He started into wakefulness to see that it was his mother standing over him with a chamber candlestick, looking very cold and white.

"How could I go to bed when you were not back?" he said sulkily.

"You can go to bed now," she said, quietly.

"Where have you been?"

She made no answer.

"Were there many of those scoundrels about?" he asked.

"The men would not injure me," she said, in the same low voice.

"But how did you get in?"

"Eve came down and admitted me," was the reply.

"What's o'clock?"

Mrs. Glaire made no answer.

"Oh, if you like to be sulky you can," said Richard, coolly; and, lighting a chamber candle, he strode off to bed.

As he turned to wind up his watch in a

sleepy manner, he found that it had run down, so with an impatient gesture he laid it aside, finished undressing, and tumbled into bed.

“Some of them will open their eyes to-morrow,” he muttered, with a half laugh. “Well, it was time to act. I’m not going to be under petticoat government all my life.”

At the same time Mrs. Glaire was seated pale and shivering in the dining-room, while all else in the house were sleeping soundly, and the street was now painfully still, for the murmuring workers of the foundry had long since sought their homes, more than one sending up a curse on Richard Glaire, instead of a prayer for his well-being and peace.

CHAPTER VIII.

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.

"IF I could only tell him everything," muttered John Maine, as he strode away from the vicar's side, and made for the farm.

He was not half way back, when he met Tom Brough, the keeper, who favoured him with a sneering, contemptuous kind of smile that made the young man's blood boil. He knew him to be a rival, though he felt sure that Jessie did not favour his suit in the slightest degree. Still her uncle seemed to look upon Brough as a likely man to make his niece a good partner; for Tom Brough expected to come in for a fair amount of property, an old relative having him down in his will for succession to a comfortable farm—

a nice thing, argued old Bultitude, for a young couple beginning life.

It might have been only fancy, but on reaching the crew-yard, old Bultitude seemed to John Maine to speak roughly to him. However, he took no notice, but went about his duties, worked very hard for a time, and went in at last to the evening meal, to find Jessie looking careworn and anxious.

After tea he sent a boy up with a message to the cricket field, saying that he was too unwell to come; and after this he went to his own room to sit and think out his future, breaking off the thread of his musings and seeking Jessie, whom he found alone, and looking strange and distant.

“Jessie,” he began, and she turned her face towards him, but without speaking, and then there was a minute’s pause.

“Jessie,” he began again, and the intention had been to speak of his own affairs, but his feelings were too much for him, and he turned

off the primary question to pass to one that had but a secondary place in his mind.

Jessie did not reply, but looked up at him timidly, in a way that checked rather than accelerated his flow of words.

"I wanted to speak to you about Daisy Banks," he said at last.

"Yes; what about her?" said Jessie, wonderingly.

"I ought not to speak perhaps; but you have no mother, and Mr. Bultitude does not seem to notice these things."

I don't know what you mean," said Jessie, wonderingly.

John Maine would gladly have backed out of his position, but it was too late, and he was obliged to flounder on.

"I meant about Daisy Banks and Mr. Richard Glaire."

"Well?" said Jessie, looking full at him.
"What about them?"

“ I meant that I don’t think you ought to be so intimate with her now.”

“ And why not ? ”

“ The Dumford people couple her name very unpleasantly with Mr. Richard’s, and for your sake I thought I’d speak.”

“ For shame ! ” cried the girl, rising, and looking angrily at him. “ That young Podmore has been talking to you.”

“ No, indeed, indeed, poor Tom never mentions her name.”

“ I won’t believe, John Maine, that you could be so petty and ungenerous yourself. Mr. Glaire loves Daisy, and she confided all to me. Such words as yours are quite an insult to her, and—and I cannot—will not stay to hear them.”

The girl’s face was burning, and she ran out of the place to hide her tears, while John Maine, whose intention had been to say something very different, sighed bitterly, and went

back to his room. There, however, everything looked blacker than ever, and he could see nothing in the gloom—devise no plan. He knew that the best proceeding would be to set the scoundrels he had seen that morning at defiance—that everybody whose opinion was worth a rush would applaud his frank declaration that he had turned from his evil courses to those which were reputable; but then the people he knew—Mr. Bultitude—Jessie—the vicar—his friends in Dumford—what would they say? There seemed to be but one chance for him—to pack up a few things in a bundle and go and seek his fortune again elsewhere—perhaps to live in peace for a few years before he should be again hunted down by some of the wolves amongst whom his early lot had been cast.

“John—John!”

He started. It was Jessie calling, and hastily going down-stairs, it was to see her with the flush gone out of her cheeks, and

looking pale and anxious, as she held out a strip of paper.

“Two rough-looking men gave this to the boy for you,” she said, looking at him in a troubled way.

He took the paper hastily, and turned away with a dark red glow spreading over his temples. He divined who had sent the note, and shivered as he thought of how the boy would chatter to everybody about the farm. Perhaps Jessie had questioned him already, and set him down as being the friend and companion of the senders.

Turning away, he walked out into the yard to find that the paper had originally been used for holding an ounce of tobacco, and upon it was scrawled in pencil :

“We ave bin spekking yu hat the krikt fele Ude betr cum.”

“2 OLE FREINDS.”

“You had better come !” What should he do ? Set them at defiance or go away at once ?

Torn by doubts he could do neither, but stood hesitating, till, in a fit of desperation, he strode off in the direction of the cricket-field.

He had saved a little money, and he might perhaps bribe them to take it and go, leaving him in peace, though he felt the while that such a proceeding would only be an invitation to them to come back, and demand more ; but even if they did, a fortnight's respite was worth all he possessed ; and, besides, it would give him time to turn round and devise some plan for freeing himself of his incubus.

To reach the cricket-field he had to pass the back-door of the vicarage ; taking, as he did, the cut through the fields ; and as he neared it, separated from it by a high hedge, his blood turned cold as he heard Mrs. Slee's shrill voice exclaim :

“ You can't miss it : the second tunning to the right, and then it's the second field.”

“ And you wean't buy the bud then, mum — that theer goldfinch as I told you off ? ”

“Bird, no,” cried Mrs. Slee; “what do I want with such clat. Let the poor thing go. You ought to be ashamed of yoursens.”

“We just about are,” said one of the men: and then, as John Maine remained breathless behind the hedge, he heard the grating of feet upon the gravel, and one said to the other:

“Say, Jem, lad, did you see?” and he made a smacking noise with his lips.

“I see,” replied Jem, “everythink.” Then, “If that theer Johnny Maine don’t show up, we’ll precious soon have the owd badger out of his earth.”

John Maine shrank back with a cloud of thoughts hurrying through his brain, foremost among which was that these men had been spying up at the vicarage. Through any window there could be seen the valuable plate on the sideboard and shelves, and the plan of offering a bird for sale was but an excuse for getting up to a house—a plan which he knew of old.

For a few moments he felt disposed to turn back ; then he was for facing them boldly : but all doubts were set at rest by footsteps coming in his direction ; so, stepping out boldly, he was soon after face to face with his two old companions, who seemed to be strolling about with their hands in their pockets, enjoying an evening pipe.

“ Here he is ! ” exclaimed Ike, grinning ; “ I knew he’d come. But howd your noise, Jem ; don’t make a row. Johnny don’t care about being seen too much along of us. It’s all raight. He knows a thing or two. There’ll be a bit of a game on soon, lad, and we shall want you. We don’t know one another, we don’t. Now, which is the gainest way to the cricket-field ? ”

John Maine pointed in the direction, and Jem came close up with a leer, saying :

“ Say, lad, recklect that plate job, eh ? Melted down at Birmingham or Sheffle, an’ no questions asked.”

John Maine shuddered as he recalled the time when he was innocently made the bearer of a heavy package to a bullion melter, and told afterwards whence the silver had been obtained.

Before he had recovered himself, the two scoundrels had sauntered away, leaving him shivering, as he thought over their words, and understood them as a threat of denunciation, unless he kept his own counsel.

Then, in imagination, he saw a party drive over from one of the big towns in a light spring-cart, drawn by a weedy screw of a horse ; an entry made at the vicarage, and everything of value swept away, while he was helpless to arrest the robbery, except at the cost of his worldly position.

He stood thinking for a time, and then strode on across the fields to the cricket ground, where a little half-hearted play was going on, the men of Dumford being too much influenced by the strike to care much for any

thing save their tobacco. He caught sight of the two men once or twice ; but they took not the slightest heed of his presence, and instead of their watching him he watched them, following them at last into the town, and seeing them go along the main street past the Glaires' house, and away up the hill, Richard coming down and passing them.

“Can they be going right away?” thought John Maine hopefully, till he recollected a low, poacher-haunted public-house about a mile beyond the chalk pit, and rightly set that down as their destination.

He turned back with a sigh, to see Tom Podmore leaning thoughtfully against one of the houses, and going up, the two young men engaged in conversation for a few minutes, each rigorously abstaining from all mention of the other's love affairs, and soon after they parted, for John Maine to seek his sleepless pillow.

CHAPTER IX.

L O S T .

THERE was no newspaper in Dumford, only those which came from Ramford and Lindum, but news flew quite fast enough without, and by breakfast-time on the morning of the day following the events spoken of in the past chapter, it was known that Daisy Banks had not been home all night.

Joe Banks himself spread the news by going and making inquiries in all directions directly he was up.

For, on waking about half-past five, according to his regular custom, and jumping out of bed to dress and go into his garden, as he had no work, he found to his astonishment that his wife had not been to bed ; and she now came

to him, crying bitterly, to say that she had been sitting up all night waiting for Daisy.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he roared.

"I wanted to screen her, Joe," moaned Mrs. Banks. "I thought you'd be so popped with the poor girl; and though I didn't like her goings on, I didn't want her to be scolded."

"What time did she go out?" said Joe, trying to recall the past night.

"About eight, and I expected her back every minute after ten."

"Here, give me my hat," cried Joe; and he was off to the main street, where, in answer to inquiries, he found that Daisy had been seen in the High Street soon after eight.

"What's wrong?" said Tom Podmore, coming out of his house.

"Daisy! hev you seen my Daisy?" said Joe, furiously.

"Yes, I see her go up the street last night at about eight," said Tom, "as if going up the hill by the chalk pit."

“Did you folly her?”

“No,” said Tom, sadly; “I never folly her now. But what’s it mean — isn’t she at home?”

“No,” said Joe, sharply. “She’s not been at home all night. Wheer can she be?”

“Better ask Master Dick Glaire,” said Tom, uttering a groan. “He can tell ye.”

“Howd thee tongue, thee silly fool,” cried Joe, angrily. “How should he know owt about where she is? Here, come along. I’ll soon show thee thou’rt wrong.”

He led the way to the Big House, where one of the maids was just opening the shutters; and, on being beckoned to, she came to the door.

“Where’s Master Richard?” said Joe.

“Fast asleep in bed,” said the girl.

“Art sure?” said Joe.

“Yes, certain,” said the girl.

“Was he out last night?”

“Yes,” said the girl; “but he came home

early, and then went out for a bit ; but he was in very soon, and sat up to let missus in, while I went to bed."

"What time will he be up?" said Joe.

"Not before nine," said the girl. "Shall I tell him you want him?"

"No," said Joe. "I'll come on again soon."

Tom seemed surprised and troubled, for he had fully expected to find that Richard Glaire was from home.

"Thou'rt wrong, lad," said Joe, drawing his breath through his teeth. "Some ill has fallen to the poor lass."

"What's up, Joe Banks?" said Harry, the big hammerman, straddling slowly up.

"Did'st see owt o' my Daisy last night?" said Joe.

Harry pulled off his cap, and gave his head a rub before answering.

"Yes, I see her go up ta hill, 'bout eight it weer."

“Did you see her come back?” asked Tom, eagerly.

“No, lad, no. I see Master Richard Glaire come along though,” said the big fellow, under the impression that that might act as a clue.

“Yes,” said Tom, bitterly. “I saw him, and again at about ten, talking to Sim Slee, and then the lads followed him up street, and he ran into the house.”

“Sim Slee!” said Joe, thinking. “We’ll ask him; but let’s go to the police.”

At the station no news could be heard, and as time went on, plenty of neighbours could be found to say that they had seen Daisy Barks go up the hill; and amongst these was the chattering old woman at the public-house. But no one had seen her return.

“Come along o’ me, lad,” said Joe Banks; and they strode up the hill, a heavy sense of dread gathering over each of the men, as they thought of the chalk pit, and the possibility of Daisy having fallen in, to lie there dead or

dying, on the rough, hard blocks at the bottom.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and the sun made the dew-sprinkled strands and twigs glitter like gems ; but to those who sought Daisy Banks, all seemed gloomy, and in spite of all his bitter feelings, Tom Podmore's heart was terribly stirred within him, so that he uttered a wild cry when just at the top, and ran ahead to pick up something soaked and wet with the night dew.

" It's her basket," he cried.

Joe staggered, and seemed to turn sick ; but recovering himself, he ran up to the younger man.

" Yes, it's her basket," he said, huskily.
" Tom, lad, look over the rail—I—I can't."

Joe Banks sank down on his knees, and covered his face with his rough hands, while Tom shuddered, and then calling up his fortitude, looked over the rail down the steep-sided pit, and uttered a cry as he drew back, ran

down the lane to the end of the slope, leaped the gate across the track where the carts descended, and running over the scattered lumps of chalk, made his way down into the deepest part of the pit, where to him it had seemed that Daisy was lying at the bottom of the wall of grey rock.

But, no, it was only her dew-soaked shawl; and though he looked in all directions, he found nothing else but a glove.

“She must have been here,” he said to himself, and in an agitated way he clambered about over the blocks of chalk, and the *débris* fallen from above; but nothing was visible, and he stood at last looking round.

There was the face of the chalk before him, and he was shut in by it right and left, the walls gradually falling lower as he turned back and passed the extinct lime-kiln, till they sloped down to the level of the track—the pit having been gradually dug in the side of the hill, every load taken out cutting farther into

the side, and making the principal wall of chalk more precipitous and high.

Still, not satisfied, Tom Podmore ran back and hunted in all directions ; but as far as he could see nothing was visible, and he turned once more to find the father coming to join him, trembling, and looking ashy pale.

"Hev you found her, Tom? hev you found her?" he gasped, and on Tom shaking his head, he caught him by the arm. "Yes," he exclaimed, in a piteous voice, "that's her shawl. Where is she gone?"

"I heven't found her," said the young man, hoarsely. "She's not there."

"Not there? Not fallen in? Thank God, thank God! But are ye sure, lad? are ye sure?"

"I've hunted the place all over," said Tom, sadly ; and then Joe Banks clutched his arm tightly, and they went straight back to the town, where Joe stopped at the Big House and was admitted, Tom Podmore following.

“Wheer’s the master?” said Joe, hastily.

“Just come down and gone out,” said the girl. “Shall I tell missus?”

“Yes,” said Joe. “No;” and then to himself, “I can’t meet her now.”

He hurried out and down the street, head after head being thrust out, while the people outside their doors gave him looks of condolence, and shook their heads by way of sympathy.

“Tom, lad,” said Joe, “I can’t kinder understand this; it’s amairzin. But look here, lad; go and ask the boys to come and help you, and mebbe you’ll get a hundred of ’em ready to search for my bairn. Get the police, too. I’m off to find the young master.”

Tom started off on his recruiting expedition; while Daisy’s father hurried down the street to try and find Richard Glaire, though not with the most remote idea of coupling him with the girl’s disappearance.

He had nearly reached the vicarage, and was passing one of the side lanes, when he heard

voices in altercation, and on glancing round it was to see the man he sought holding Sim Slee by the throat, and shaking him violently.

"You treacherous hound!" he was saying, "and after the way I've trusted you."

"Joe Banks, here, Joe Banks, help!" yelled Sim; but before Daisy's father could reach the couple, Richard Glaire threw the democrat off, so that he staggered against the wall.

"You dog!" cried Richard, grinding his teeth.

"All right," whimpered Sim. "All right, Mr. Richard Glaire, Esquire. I've stood up for you enew lately; now tak' care of yoursen."

"I'll break your head, you scoundrel, if you don't go," roared Richard.

Sim rubbed the dust from his person and shook himself straight, looking side-wise the while at his assailant before sidling off, shaking his fist; and then, when about fifty yards away, turning round and shouting:

"I'll be even with you for this, Dick Glaire."

Richard made a rush at him, when Sim took to his heels and ran, while the young man turned back to where Joe Banks stood holding poor Daisy's basket and shawl.

"Master Dick," said the old man sternly, "I want to ask thee a question, and I want yow, as your father's son, to give me a straightforward answer."

"But what does this all mean, Joe? what's this about Daisy?"

"Answer my question," said the old man, sternly; and then he paused for a moment, as he fixed his clear eyes on the young man's shifty face, before saying hoarsely:

"Were you out walking wi' my lass, Daisy, last night?"

"No," said Richard, firmly; "certainly not."

"And thee didn't see her last night at all?"

"Yes, oh yes," said Richard, eagerly. "I did see her, and said, 'How d'ye do.'"

"Wheer?" said Joe Banks, without moving a muscle.

"Up by the chalk pit, at the top of the hill. I'd been having a round."

"What time?" said Joe, shortly.

"Well, let me see," said Richard, hesitating. "I came straight down home, and it was about half-past eight when I got in."

Joe stood thinking: the servant-girl had said that her master had come in early.

"And you didn't see my bairn after?" said Joe, gazing full in the young man's eyes.

"Certainly not," said Richard.

"Will yow swear it?" said Joe.

Richard hesitated for a moment, and then, with a half laugh, said:

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"Perhaps I shall like, my lad; but I don't ask you to sweer now. You've heerd, I s'pose?"

"I've heard something, Joe, but can't quite make it out," said the young man.

"It's easy," said Joe, hoarsely. "My poor bairn came up town last night, and she hasn't

been back. We foun' these here up by the chalk pit."

"But she hadn't fallen in?"

"No, my lad, no," said the old man, quietly, for he was thinking deeply. "But thankye, thankye. They wanted to make me believe as you meant harm to the lass—all on 'em; but I knew you, lad, well, as your poor owd father's son."

"Mr. Banks!"

"Aw raight, my lad, aw raight. I never thowt it of you, never; but the tongues would wag; and I said if thee loved the bairn thee should'st hev her. You do her harm! Not you, lad; you cared too much for her. But harm's come to her some way. Let's find her."

"But how could they say such things of me?" said Richard, with virtuous indignation shining out of his eyes.

"Oh, they're a chithering lot," exclaimed Joe. "They'd seen thee talk to the bairn, or

mebbe seen thee heving a walk wi' her, and that weer enew to set their tongues clacking. But we must be going, mun, for we're losing time; and if any one's done wrong by my bairn——"

Richard shrank away, startled at the lurid flash from the old man's eyes, as setting his teeth, and clenching his massive fist, he shook it at vacancy, and then, without another word, strode on, accompanied by Richard, who was trembling now like a leaf.

"Let me go in here for a moment or two," said Richard, as they came abreast of the House; and as the door was thrown open, it was to show Mrs. Glaire and Eve both standing dressed in the hall.

"Oh, Mr. Banks," exclaimed the latter, running to the old foreman, "this is very dreadful," and she caught one of his hands in hers.

"Thanky'e, dear bairn, thanky'e," he said, smiling upon her with quivering lip.

“ But I saw her last night,” cried Eve.

“ Ay ? What time, miss, what time ? ” said Joe, eagerly.

“ About eight,” said Eve, quickly. “ She said, I think, that she was going to meet Richard.”

“ She said that ? ” said the old man, starting, while Richard turned pale.

“ No, I remember,” said Eve, piteously ; “ I told her she was going to meet him.”

“ Yes, yes,” said Joe, thoughtfully. “ You were jealous of the poor bairn.”

Eve started back, blushing crimson.

“ But are you sure she has not been home, Joe Banks ? ” said Mrs. Glaire, looking at him wistfully.

“ Sure, ay, quite sure,” said Joe, sternly. “ Here is the poor bairn’s shawl, and her basket too. I’ll leave ’em here, if you’ll let me.”

He laid them down in the hall, and stepped out to where there was quite a crowd of workmen now, waiting to help in the search ; but as

they caught sight of Richard Glaire, who now came forward, there was a savage groan.

"Ask him where he's put thee bairn, Joe Banks; he knows," cried a shrill voice, that of some woman; and another groan arose, making Richard draw back shivering.

"Look at the white-faced coward," shouted a man. "Ask him, Joe Banks, ask him."

"Nay, nay, lads," said the foreman, sternly. "Ye're aw wrong. I hev asked him, and he's told me. He knows nowt about the poor bairn."

A murmur arose at this, but Joe Banks turned round to where Richard stood.

"You come along o' me, Master Richard, and no one 'll lay a finger on thee whiles thou'rt by my side. He was at home aw night, lads, and it's not him as would do her harm."

The little crowd seemed only half satisfied; but they gave place as, making an effort, the young man stepped out, and then in a purpose-

less way the search was about to begin, when there was a cheer given, for the vicar came hurrying up the street.

He looked hot and flushed, and his eyes met those of Richard Glaire so sternly that, for the moment, the young man blushed, but he recovered himself directly, to give an insolent stare in return.

“Mr. Banks,” exclaimed the vicar, “this is grievous news indeed ;” and ignoring the foreman’s half-distant manner, he shook his hand warmly.

“Thanky, parson,” said Joe, hoarsely.

“You are about to make a general search, of course,” he said ; “but where are the police ?”

“One’s gone across to station, and the other’s up at the chalk pit,” said a voice.

“First of all,” said the vicar, “did any one here see Daisy Banks after she went up the road ?”

There was silence for a few moments, and then Richard said firmly :

"I saw her for a few moments up by the pit."

"And not after?" said the vicar, fixing his eyes on the young man.

"I object to this cross-examination," said Richard, hotly. "This is not a magistrate."

"Parson asked thee a plain question, lad; give him a plain answer," said Joe, quietly. "Thou'st nowt to fear."

"No, then," said Richard, loudly. "I was at home."

"Mr. Banks, then, you had better take twenty men; you go with these twenty, Podmore; and——"

He hesitated a moment, when Joe Banks said:

"Master Richard will take another twenty."

"And another score will perhaps go with me," said the vicar. "Then we'll each take one road; and mind, my men, every ditch, copse, and pond must be well searched; and, above all, mind and ask at every cottage on

the road, who has passed, and what carts or carriages have gone along since last night."

The parties were soon told off, when the vicar exclaimed :

"But stop! There were two strangers here yesterday."

"Yes," chorused several. "Two ill-looking chaps from one of the big towns."

"Ay," cried big Harry; "and I sin 'em go up towards the chalk pit."

"So did I," said another.

There was silence for a moment or two, and Tom Podmore seemed to feel the place go round, but he roused himself directly as he heard the vicar's clear ringing voice :

"Then if some treacherous, unmanly scoundrel has not carried off, or persuaded this poor girl to leave father, mother, and home, for his own bad ends, we have found the clue. But mind this, my lads, we are going to run down those two men, but no violence. Let's take them, but we must prove that they have been guilty."

“Aw raight, parson;” and the whole party were for a rush up the road towards the chalk pit; but the vicar kept them to their separate tasks; and, glancing upwards, he caught a glimpse of two pale faces at the Big House, and the faces were those of Eve Pelly and Mrs. Glaire.

Then each party started, and the search began.

CHAPTER X.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

THE chalk pit naturally formed the great attraction, and on reaching it, the spots were pointed out where basket and shawl were found; but though a careful search was made by a portion of the force, nothing was for some time found to account for the disappearance.

The party had, however, divided here, and a portion of them, under Big Harry, had hastened along the road toward the Four Alls, the name of the little public-house where it was expected to hear some tidings of the men who had been seen in the town, and who must have passed, even if they were guiltless of wrong. The vicar, however, chose to remain behind, with about ten of his party, and together they

began to make a more careful search about the pit—the first investigation being of the low post-and-rail fence which ran along the edge, to see if it was perfect in every part.

Yes, there was no doubt of it; not a rail was broken, or post bent out of the perpendicular, as would probably have been the case had any one fallen against it or been pushed over. Not even a piece of the shallow turf growing on the very brink of the pit was disordered, and the vicar was about to give up that part of the search, when he made a leap forward, and took from a rough splintered portion of the divided fir-pole which formed the rail a tiny scrap of red worsted, such as might very well have been torn from Daisy's shawl.

“I think we're on the right track, my lads,” said the vicar. “Now let's divide, and we'll search the coppice here, along the edge of the pit.”

The men went eagerly to work, and searched foot by foot the little thin sprinkling of fir

trees and gorse that hung upon the edge of the declivity, but without avail—there was not a spot that could have sheltered a human form that was not scanned, and the divided party met at last upon the low ground at the slope of the hill, where the cart track cut its way in, and the lime-kiln stood half-way into the pit.

The vicar paused for a moment by the kiln, and peered in. It was not burning, and in a few minutes he was able to satisfy himself that no one had been in there, and with a shudder he turned away, spreading his men so that step by step they examined the rough white and gray blocks that had been thrown aside or had fallen. Some were fresh and of the purest white, with here and there delicate traces of the pectens and cardiums of a former shelly world; others were hoary and grey, and covered with a frosty lichen; while others, again, were earth-stained and brown.

In accordance with their leader's instructions, each block was eagerly examined, the vicar's

idea being that it was possible for a cruel murder to have taken place, and for the token of the hideous crime to have been hidden, by laying it in some depression, and piling up the pieces of chalk, of which ample lay ready, for hiding a hundred such crimes.

But, no ; there were footmarks here and there, and traces of the edges of the blocks having been chipped by heavy boots ; but no spot could be found where they could satisfy themselves that they had been removed.

By this time some forty more sturdy workmen had come up ; the event, in the midst of their enforced idleness from the works, being hailed as an excitement ; and any amount of muscle was ready to help if directed.

The long search was, however, in vain ; and their leader was pondering as to what he should do next, when a rough voice shouted :

“ See here, lads. We'll do ony mander o' thing to find Joe Banks's bairn. Come on ! let's hurl iver y bit o' calk out o' the pit.”

There was a shout at this, and the men were about to put their project in execution, when the vicar held up his hand.

“It’s waste of strength, my lads,” he said. “I am fully convinced that none of these blocks have been moved. Better search the lanes along the road.”

“Aw raight, parson,” was the cry; and the men left the pit to proceed along the road, the vicar on in front, so as to reach The Four Alls.

Before they had gone far they encountered the rest of their party, returning without further success than that of making the announcement that the men they sought had called there about nine, and had then gone on, being taken up for a lift by a man with a cart.

“What man, and what cart?” said one of the police constables, who had now come up.

The men did not know, and this being an important point, the whole party now hastened on to the little roadside inn—a shabby, dilapidated place, whose shed at the side, which

represented the stabling, was falling away from the house, and whose premises generally seemed to be arranged by the owner as places for storing rubbish, dirt, and green scummed pools of water. There was a cart with one wheel, and a mangy horse with one eye, and apparently a ragged hen with one leg, but she put down another, made a low-spirited remark evidently relating to stolen eggs, and went off pecking here and there in a disconsolate manner, as if her search for food were one of the most hopeless pursuits under the sun. There was a garden, roughly fenced in, by the side of the house ; but its crop consisted of last year's gray cabbage-stumps ; while, but for the sign over the door, nearly defaced, but having visible the words "wines and spirituous," the place could hardly have been taken for a place of refreshment, even though the occupant of this attractive spot stood at the door, showing the potency of the said "wines and spirituous" liquors in his reddened and blotched face, as

he leaned against the door-post, smoking a long clay pipe, and staring lazily at the party who now came up.

“Can you give us any information about the two men who came here last night?” said the vicar.

“Say?” said the man, staring.

“Gentleman wants to know wheer them chaps is gone,” said the constable.

“How should I know?” said the man, surly. “Californy or Roosalum, for owt I know.”

“No nonsense, Brumby,” said the constable. “You’d best speak out. Who wheer they?”

“Friends o’ mine,” said the man, taking his pipe out of his mouth for a moment, to relieve himself of a tremendous volume of smoke.

“What were their names?”

“How should I know? They come here, and has a bit o’ rafrashment, and they goes again. What do I keer, so long as they wares their money.”

"Who had they got wi' 'em?"

"Nobbut their own sens."

"But I mean when they comed."

"Look ye here, I hadn't going to answer all your queshtons."

"Well, look here; had they any one wi' 'em when they went away?"

"Nobbat theer own sens," said the man, sulkily.

"Well, who gave them a lift?"

"Don't know, on'y as it weer a man in a cart."

"But you must ha' seen his name."

"No, I musn't if it wern't painted on," bawled the man. "What d'yer come wher-
retin' me for about it? I don't ask my cus-
tomers who comes in for a gill o' ale wheer they
come from, nor wheer they're going."

"Had they a young girl with them?" said the vicar, who was getting out of patience.

"Not as I know on," said the man. "One had nobbut a whip."

There was evidently nothing to be got out

of him, so the party returned to Dumford, the policeman undertaking to communicate by telegraph with the towns through which the men would be likely to pass, as this would be the surest and quickest way.

As the day wore on, the other parties returned to assemble and discuss the matter; though there was little to discuss, for Joe Banks had returned without a trace being found of his child, and the same ill fortune had attended Podmore and Richard Glaire.

The latter, as soon as he reached home, however, sought Mrs. Glaire, who was lying down, apparently ill at ease, with Eve in attendance upon her, the young girl rising with a shiver as her cousin entered the room, and leaving without encountering his eyes.

"Where is Daisy Banks, mother?" said Richard, hoarsely, as soon as they were alone. "I've kept up this foolery of searching all day, to quiet these people, and now I insist upon knowing where she is."

"I should ask you that," said Mrs. Glaire, angrily; "but if I did I should not learn the truth. Where have you taken her?"

"Taken her?" said Richard, savagely. "Where should I take her? You know I was at home all last night."

"Where you had planned to take her," said Mrs. Glaire, coldly.

"I planned!" cried Richard. "Why, I left her with you. Plans, indeed!"

"Daisy Banks was not with me ten minutes," said Mrs. Glaire, quietly. "I said plans, because——"

"Because what?" cried Richard.

"Do you wish me to tell you?"

"Yes, if you have anything to tell."

"Because you paid that chattering ass, Slee, to carry letters to and fro, between you and Daisy, after you had given me your word of honour that you would see her no more. Because you then, after gradually bringing the silly girl over to your purposes, paid or bribed,

which you will, Simeon Slee, the man who has been one of the projectors of this wretched strike, to act as your pander to take this girl off to London, to await your coming. It is your doing ; so now you had better seek her."

"How did you know all this?"

"How did I know?" said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously. "How are such things known? You leaned upon a bruised reed, and it broke and entered your hand."

"Did Sim Slee tell you all this, then?" said Richard, stamping with fury.

"Yes ; and he would have told me long ago, had I given him what the knave wants—money."

"A treacherous scoundrel!" cried Richard ; "trusting him as I did."

"You knew him to be a treacherous, prating scoundrel ; so why did you trust him?"

"Because I was a fool," roared the young man, biting his nails with rage.

"Exactly ; because you were a fool, and

because no honest man would help you to be guilty of the great sin you meant to commit, of stealing the daughter of the man who had been your father's best friend—the man who helped him to make his fortune. Scoundrels are necessary to do scoundrels' work."

"But he cheated me," cried Richard; "he took my money, and he has not performed his promise."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Glaire.

"But when did you know this?" cried Richard.

"You own to it, then?" cried Mrs. Glaire, gazing sharply at him.

"Never mind whether I own it or not. A scoundrel! I'll serve him out for this."

"I have known it only a few hours," said Mrs. Glaire, sinking back on her couch, and watching the young man, as he stamped up and down the room.

"But he has thrown me over," cried Richard. "I don't know where the girl is."

“Who has thrown you over?” said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously.

“You needn’t believe me without you like,” said Richard; “but I am speaking the truth now. Sim Slee was to take her across to Lupthorpe station, and go with her to town.”

“Yes.”

“And stay with her till I came, after the heat of the row was over; for no one would have missed him.”

“Well?” said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously.

“Well, he has thrown me over,” said Richard. “I met him this morning, and found he had not been.”

“What did he say?” said Mrs. Glaire.

“Swore he couldn’t find her.”

“Then the wolf set the fox to carry off the lamb, and now the fox says he has not seen the prey,” said Mrs. Glaire, smiling.

“D——n your riddles and fables!” cried Richard, who was beside himself with rage. “I tell you he has sold me.”

"What you might have expected," said his mother.

"The scoundrel has hidden her somewhere," cried Richard ; "and it's his plan to get more money out of me."

"What you might have expected," said Mrs. Glaire, again. "You had better set the police to watch him and find him out."

"Not while I can do it better myself," said the young man, with a cunning grin upon his countenance. "You have both been very clever, I dare say you think ; and if the truth were known, you have been setting Sim Slee to get her away, so as to marry me to your pet ; but you won't succeed."

"You are wrong, Richard ; I would not trust Sim Slee with the value of a penny. I gave him ten pounds for his information, and I have not seen him since. You had better employ the police."

"Curse the police !" cried Richard, looking hard at his mother's face, and feeling that she

was telling him the truth ; “ what good are they ? I might have been killed before they would have interfered. But I’ve not done with Master Sim Slee yet.”

“ Then you will not employ the police ? ”

“ No,” said Richard, sharply ; “ the matter’s tangled enough as it is ; but he’s got the wrong man to deal with, has Sim Slee, if he thinks he has cheated me so easily.”

“ Better leave him alone,” said Mrs. Glaire, wearily. “ You have enough to attend to with your own affairs.”

“ This is my affair,” cried Richard.

“ Bombast and sound,” said his mother. “ I suppose you and Slee are in collusion, and this is done to blind me, and the rest of the town. But there, you must follow your own course.”

“ I mean to,” said Richard ; and the breach between him and his mother seemed to be getting wider than ever.

CHAPTER XI.

A FRIENDLY MEETING.

THERE was a goodly meeting at the Bull and Cucumber that evening, for the discussion of the disappearance of Daisy Banks. Sim Slee was there, and one of the chief spokesmen.

“Well, what do you say, Sim?” said the landlord, with a wink at his other guests, as much as to say, “Let’s draw him out.”

“Say!” cried Sim; “why, that Dick Glaire’s a lungeing villin. Look at him: a man fixed in business as he is, and plenty o’ money, and he knows nowt but nastiness. He ought to be hung.”

“Where weer you to-day, Sim?” said another. “I didn’t see thee helping.”

“Helping!” said Sim; “why, I was in the

thicket all day. Search indeed! what's the good o' searching for what aint theer?"

"Do you know wheer she is?" said the landlord.

"If yow want to know wheer Daisy Banks is, ask Dicky Glaire, and——"

"And what?" said several, for Sim had stopped short.

"And he wean't tell yow," said Sim. "He knows, though. Why, he's been mad after the lass for months; and if she weer my bairn, I'd half kill him; that's what I'd do wi' him. He's a bad lot, and it's a pity as Dumford can't get shoot of him. Such rubbish! he's ony fit to boon the roads."

"Well, Sim," said the grocer, "when they make you boon master, you can use him up o' purpose."

"Hello!" said Sim, "what! are yow here? I thowt as the Bull and Cowcumber wasn't good enew for such as thee."

"You niver thowt so, Sim," said the jovial

little grocer, laughing, "till I wouldn't give thee any more credit till thou had paid what thee owdst."

"I can pay yow any day," said Sim, chinking the money in his pocket.

"Yes, but yow wean't," said the grocer, imitating Sim's broad Lincoln dialect. "Yes, I wanted to hear a bit o' the news," he continued, "so I thowt I'd put up the shuts and have a gill and a pipe, same as another man ; for I niver object to my 'lowance, as is good for any man as works hard."

"So 'tis, so 'tis," chorussed several.

"How chuff we are to-night," said Sim, with a sneer ; "why, yow're getting quite sharp. Yow wearn't so nation fast wi' your tongue fore yow took to trade and was only a bricklayer. It's all very fine for a man to marry a grocer's widow, and take to her trade and money, and then come and teach others, and bounce about his money."

"Oh, I'm not ashamed of having handled the

mortar-trowel before I took to the sugar-scoop," said the grocer, laughing.

"When it used to be to the boy," continued Sim, mimicking the other's very slow drawling speech: "'Joey, wilt thou bring me another brick?' and then thou used to groan because it weer so heavy."

"Sim Slee's in full swing to-night," said another guest.

"He will be if he don't look out, for Tom Podmore says he's sure he had a hand in getting away Daisy Banks," said another; "and Joe Banks is sure of it. I wouldn't be surprised if he hung him."

"Don't you be so nation fast," said Sim, changing colour a little, but laughing it off the next moment. "Iv I were a owry chap like thee, Sam'l Benson, I'd wesh mesen afore I took to talking about other folk. It was Sam'l, you know," continued Sim, to the others, "that owd parson spoke to when he weer a boy. 'When did thee wesh thee hands last, Sam?' he

says, pointing at 'em wi' his stick. 'When we'd done picking tates,' says Sam, He, he, he! and that was three months before, and parson give 'im a penny to ware in soap."

There was a hearty laugh at this, in which the man of whom the story was told joined.

"Strange different sort o' man this one to the last parson," said the grocer.

"Ay, he is. Do you mind owd parson's dunk pigs?" said Johnson, the butcher.

"To be sure," said the landlord, rapping his pipe. "I've got four of the same breed now."

"He used to come and see you pretty oftens, didn't he?" said the grocer.

"Oh, yes; he'd come toddling up on the saints' days to Mrs. Winny's there, and sit for a bit, and then come across here, and sit and wait, and have a gill o' ale, and then if there was anybody coming up to church, Jacky Budd—Jacky Budd's father, you know—would come and fetch him, and if there was nobody

coming Jacky used to lock the church doors again and go back home."

"He was a rum one, he was. Fond of his garden, too."

"Well, so's this un," said the landlord. "He's gotten it to raights now."

"Course he has," said Slee. "Getten it done for nowt, wi' Tom Podmore and big Harry, and iver so many more wucking for him."

"You let th' parson alone, Sim," said the landlord, who was a bit of an autocrat in his own parlour, "and he'll let thee alone."

"I should hope he would. He's fun me a hot one a'ready," said Sim.

"He's a good sort, is parson," said Johnson, the butcher; "and it's how do, and shake hands, as friendly with ye, as if you was the best in the land."

"Yes," said the grocer; "and he don't come begging and borrowing always."

"Begging, no," said Johnson, chuckling.

"Why, he's paid me thutty pounds this last ten days for meat."

"Thutty pounds!" said the landlord.

"Ay, all that."

"What for?" said Sim.

"Meat for soup," said Johnson.

"Ah, and I've took a lot of him for grosheries," said the grocer.

"Yes; he's giving away a sight o' money," said the landlord, "to them as is on strike and wants it. He says to me, only yesterday, when I went across to take him a bit o' Marquory—it was some as we'd got very fine—'Thankye, Robinson,' he says, 'so that's Mercury, is it?'—he called it 'Mercury.' 'I never see any before,' he says. 'We call it Good King Henry down in the South.' 'Yes, sir,' I says, 'that's marquory, and as good a vegetable as you can eat.' 'Makes a difference in your trade, this strike, I suppose,' he says. 'Our takings aint been above half, sir,' I says, 'since it begun.' 'Sorry for it,' he says, 'sorry

for it. I don't dislike to see men come and have their pipe and glass in moderation, and then chat after work ; and I'm sure, Robinson,' he says, ' you are not the man to let any one exceed.' ' Never do if I can help it, sir,' I says ; and then he talked for ever so long, and then he took me in and give me a glass o' wine, and shew'd me his silver cups as he'd won at college, and rowing and running, and one thing and another ; and when I was coming away he says, ' Tell me,' he says, ' if you hear of anybody very hard pushed through the strike, and I'll see what I can do.' "

" Here's parson's very good health," said Johnson, the butcher ; and it was drunk by all present but Sim, who uttered a loud, " Yah ! "

" They say he's makkin' up to Mrs. Glaire, don't they ? " said the grocer.

" Ay, they say so," said the butcher ; " and that owd Purley's sister and Miss Primgeon are both in a regular takkin' about it. They've both been wucking slippers for him."

"He was fine and on about Daisy Banks, to-day," said the landlord. "I heerd, too, as Joe Banks quarrelled wi' him for interfering 'bout her, just afore she went."

"How did you hear that?" said the grocer.

"Joe Banks's Missus towld mine," said the landlord. "But, say, lads, what's this 'bout Bultitude's John Maine?"

"Don't know—what?" said first one and then another.

"Why, I hear as he was seen talking to a couple of owry-looking poacher chaps, down the road—them two, as they think, had something to do wi' Daisy Banks going off."

"Yes, I see 'em," said Sim; "and I see John Maine talking to 'em."

"Regular rough couple," continued the landlord. "They comed here just as my Missus was busy wi' her sweeping-brush, and wanted her to buy a three-gill bottle, or give 'em a gill o' ale for it."

"And she wouldn't," said Sim, grinning.

“Yes, she would, and did,” said the landlord. “She was all alone in the house ; for I was out in the close, and she thowt it best to be civil to ’em ; but she kept a pretty sharp eye on ’em all the time.”

“Then John Maine’s had a hand in it ; see if he ain’t,” said Sim.

“Don’t know so much about that,” said the landlord. “Some say as you know more than you keer to tell.”

“Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don’t,” said Sim, sententiously. “There’s things as I know on, and things as I don’t. I’m going now.”

“Tell the owd woman to hap you up well to-night, Sim,” said one.

“Say, Sim,” said another, “ask her to get out her scithers and coot thee hair.”

“You’re going agates early, Sim,” said another.

“Yes, I’m off,” said Sim ; “and mebbe it’ll be some time before you see me here again, or mebbe I shall be here again to-morrow night.

Good-night, all," and he went out, looking very triumphant, telling himself that he had been too much for "that lot," and that he knew what he was about.

There were those present, though, who were not above saying that it was on account of Tom Podmore coming in, to sit near the door, looking wearied out with anxiety as he let his head drop upon his hand, and sat there thoughtful and silent, while those present, knowing his feelings towards the missing girl, changed the subject that they were resuming, and entered upon the question of the duration of the strike.

CHAPTER XII.

THREATENINGS.

As the days passed, and no information could be obtained respecting Daisy Banks, and the efforts of the police to trace the two strangers proved utterly fruitless, John Maine was in a state of mind not to be envied. By degrees it oozed out more and more that he had been seen with the two men, and the police came down to the farm, to question him, looking suspiciously at him, as he told them that they were men he had met once before in the neighbourhood of Nottingham ; and when the constables left he had the annoyance of feeling that he would be watched, for it was evident that he was looked upon with suspicion.

Joe Banks had been nearly mad with excite-

ment, and leaving his sobbing wife day after day, he had searched and researched the country round, aided by Tom Podmore, Harry, and a score of the other men. Richard Glaire had made no show of assisting after the first day, for he had awakened to the fact that the town was not a safe home for him, and it was fully his intention to leave the place for awhile ; but, for his own reasons, he preferred to wait a little longer.

Sim Slee was about now a good deal, and another encounter had taken place between him and Richard, after which Sim had gone round to the vicarage back door, to implore help from his wife, asserting that he was half killed, and begging her to come home and attend on him.

As it happened, the vicar heard him, and came to see how bad were his injuries, and to offer to set his housekeeper at liberty.

“ I'll manage without you, Mrs. Slee, if you like,” he said kindly.

“But I don’t like,” said Mrs. Slee; “there’ll be fifty people here soon for soup and bread, and how can you get shoot of ’em all wi’out me?”

“Thou must come home, lovey,” said Sim, in a dismal voice. “I’m very bad. I’ve got money anew, too, now to keep us for weeks.”

“Where didst thou get money from?” said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

“Never thou mind,” said Sim. “I’ve gotten it, and now come home.”

“But how did you get knocked about like that?” said the vicar, smiling to himself.

“That cursed Dicky Glaire set upon me,” moaned Sim, one of whose eyes was swollen up, while there was a cut across the bridge of his nose. “He’s mad wi’ me because I wouldn’t help him to carry off Daisy Banks to London, and he’s leathered me this how. But I’ll hev it out of him yet.”

“Did Dicky Glaire want yow to get her away?” said Mrs. Slee.

"Yes, a coward, and I wouldn't," said Sim, "so he's done it his sen."

"Be careful what you are saying, Mr. Slee," said the vicar, snipping a strip of sticking-plaister off a piece in his pocket-book with his nail-scissors, and breathing upon it to make it warm.

"Keerful," said Sim; "he deserves to be hung for it."

"Do you mean to assert that Mr. Glaire has done this? Because if so, you will have to substantiate your statement before a magistrate."

"I don't say for certain as he has," said Sim; "but he wanted me to, and I wouldn't. Oh! oh! oh!"

"Stand still, man, and don't be such a cur," cried the vicar, sharply, for he had been applying the plaister to Sim's slight cut, and the hero had begun to howl dismally.

"It's half killing me," cried Sim, again.

"Take hold of his head, Mrs. Slee; the cut is nothing at all."

Mrs. Slee seized Sim pretty roughly, and held him by his ears, while the plaister was affixed, the great orator moaning and flinching and writhing till he was set at liberty.

“Is it bad, sir?” said Mrs. Slee, then.

“So bad,” said the vicar, “that if a school-boy of nine or ten received such a drubbing from a playmate, he would have washed his face and said nothing about it.”

“Said nowt about it!” cried Sim. “Aye, it’s easy for them as aint hurt to talk. Thou’lt come home wi’ me, lovey?”

“No. Go thee gate,” said Mrs. Slee.

“Do ’ee come, lovey,” said Sim.

“I wean’t,” said Mrs. Slee, shortly; and without more ado, she took her lord by the shoulders, and guided him to the door, which she closed upon him, leaving him to make his way up the street, vowing vengeance against Richard Glaire, the parson, and all the world.

In fact, mischief was brewing, and would have come to a head sooner but for the episode

of Daisy's disappearance. A deputation of the men had waited upon Richard Glaire, and offered terms for coming back to work ; but he had obstinately held out for the reparation to be made, increasing the value he had previously set upon the destroyed bands, and declaring that if he were not paid a hundred and fifty pounds damages, he would keep the works closed.

"Thou'lt be sorry for this, Maister," said the man who acted as spokesman.

"Sorry !" said Richard, defiantly. "I'm sorry I ever had such a set of curs to work for me."

"But we've telled you as it was none o' us."

"I don't care who it was," retorted Richard ; "I want a hundred and fifty pounds for the damage done ; and I ought to have payment for my losses by the foundry standing still."

"Our wives and bairns 'll soon be pined to dead," said another man.

"You should have thought of that before,"

said Richard, coldly. "A hundred and fifty pounds made up amongst you, and the fires may be lit, and we'll go on once more; till that's paid I'll keep the place locked up if I'm ruined by it."

Then came the disappearance of Daisy Banks, and it wanted but little on the part of Sim Slee to half madden the weaker spirits against the man who was starving their wives and children, and had robbed Joe Banks of his daughter.

It so happened that Joe Banks, on the day following Sim's doctoring, about a fortnight after the disappearance, during which time he had not seen Mrs. Glaire, but only Eve, who had been again and again to try and administer comfort to Mrs. Banks, came upon a knot of men, listening to an oration made by Sim Slee, who, as soon as he saw Joe coming up in company with Tom Podmore, who was his staunch and faithful ally throughout, cried loudly :

“Here he comes! Here comes the down-trodden, ill-used paytriot, who has served the rotten family for thirty year, and then been robbed for his pains. He’s agoing to join my brotherhood now, lads—him and Tom Podmore.”

“Hooray!” cried the men.

“And he’ll be a captain and a leader among us as is going to beat down the oppressors and robbers of our flocks and herds. He’s agoing, lads, to pull down with us the bloated Aristorchus, as is living on his oil olive, and honey, while we heven’t bread to put in the mouths of our bairns.”

There was a groan here from the little crowd, some of whom readily accepted Sim Slee’s Aristorchus, as they would have taken in any loud-sounding word in their present humour.

“Come on, brave captain, as hev had your eye-lids opened to the malice and wickedness of your employer, and join them as is going to

groan no more under the harrows and plough-shares of oppression. It is said as the ox or beast shan't be muzzled as treadeth out the corn, and we aint agoing to let that oppressor, Dicky Glaire, muzzle us any more."

"Hooray!" cried the growing crowd.

"Come on, then, brave captain. Lads, Joe Banks is a man as we'll be proud to serve wi'; and wi' Tom Podmore too, for they've cast off their slough"—Sim called this "sluff"—"of blindness, and hev awaked to the light and glory of liberty. Come on."

"What do you mean?" said Joe Banks, firmly.

"Mean, brave captain and leader!" cried Sim, making his plaid waistcoat wrinkle with his exertions; "why, that we're going to trample down him as robbed thee of thy bairn."

"Who's that?" said Joe Banks, sternly.

"Who's that? Ask anybody here if it aint Dicky Glaire, the oppressor, as is going to sneak outer the town to-night to catch the mail

train over yonder at the station, and then going to laugh and sneer and mock at the poor, grey old father as he's deceived, and—"

"It's a lie," roared Joe. "Who says Richard Glaire took away my poor murdered bairn?"

"Everybody," said Sim, who was standing on a wall about five feet high, his plaistered face giving him rather a grotesque aspect. "Everybody says it."

"No," roared Joe, "it's you as says it, you lying, chattering magpie. Howd thee tongue, or I'll—"

He seized the speaker by the legs, and had him down in an instant, clutched by the throat, and began shaking him violently.

"Go on," said Sim, who this time preserved his presence of mind. "I aint the first patriot as has been a martyr to his cause; kill me if you like."

"Kill thee, thou noisy starnel of a man! Say as it's a lie again your maister, or I'll shake thee till thou dost."

"I wean't say it's a lie," cried Sim. "Ask anybody if it aint true."

Joe Banks looked round furiously, and a chorus broke out of, "It's true, lad; it's true."

"There," cried Sim, triumphantly. "What hev you to say to that? Ask Tom Podmore what he thinks."

"I will," cried Joe Banks, who was somewhat staggered by the unanimity of opinion. "Tom Podmore, speak out like a true man and tell these all as it's a lie."

Tom remained silent.

"D'ye hear, Tom? Speak out," cried Joe.

"I'd rather not speak," said Tom, quietly.

"But thou must, lad, thou must," cried Sim. "Are you going to see a man a martyr for a holy cause, when you can save him?"

"Speak! speak!" cried Joe, panting with rage and emotion; "tell 'em you know it's a lie, Tom."

"I can't," said Tom, who was driven to bay,

“for I believe Richard Glaire has got her away.”

“Theer, I telled you,” said Sim. “He wanted me to help him, only you wean’t believe.”

“No, no, no,” roared Joe; “and I wean’t believe it now. He wouldn’t, he couldn’t do it. He told me he hadn’t; and he wouldn’t tell me a lie.”

The little crowd opened as the true-hearted old fellow strode away, without turning his head, and Tom Podmore followed him towards his home, and at last spoke to him.

Joe turned upon him savagely.

“Go away,” he cried. “I’ve done wi’ you. I thowt as Tom Podmore were a man, instead o’ one o’ them chattering maulkin-led fools; but thou’rt like the rest.”

Tom Podmore stopped short, with his brow knit, while Joe Banks passed on out of sight.

“He’ll find out, and believe different some day,” said Tom, slowly. “Poor old man, it’s

enough to break his heart. But I wean't break mine."

As he stood, the noise of cheering came from where he had left Sim Slee talking, and he stood listening and thinking.

"They'll be doing him a mischief 'fore they've done, and then they'll end the old works. D—n him ! I hate him," he cried, grinding his teeth ; "but I can't stand still and let Sim Slee's lot bruise and batter his face as they would till they'd 'most killed him. He's soft, and smooth, and good-looking, and I'm——well, I'm a rough un," he continued, smiling with contemptuous pity on himself. "It's no wonder she should love him best, poor lass ; but she'd better hev been a honest lad's wife—missus to a man as wouldn't hev said an unkind thing to her to save his life. But they say it's woman-kind-like : they takes most to him as don't keer for 'em."

He stood thinking irresolutely, as the noise and cheering continued : and once he turned

to go ; but the next moment he was himself, and saying softly :

“Daisy, my poor little lass, it's for thee—it's for thee ;” he strode hastily to the Big House, knocked, and was admitted.

“Tell Mr. Richard I want to see him,” said Tom ; and the servant-girl smiled pleasantly at the fine, sturdy young fellow.

“I don't think he'll see thee, Mr. Podmore,” said the girl, “because he's so cross about the foundry people. I'll tell him a gentleman wants to see him.”

She tripped away, and in a few minutes Richard came down to stand scowling at him.

“What do you want ?” he said, glaring at his rival.

Tom Podmore writhed mentally, and his nerves tingled with the desire to take Richard Glaire by the throat, and shake him till he could not breathe ; but he controlled himself, and said sturdily :

“I come to tell thee some ill news.”

“What is it?” said Richard, thrusting his hand into his breast, for his visitor had taken a step forward.

Tom Podmore saw the motion and smiled, but he paid no further heed, and went on bluntly:

“Thou wast going away by train to-night.”

“Who says so?” cried Richard, turning pale.

“The lads out there—Sim Slee’s gang,” said Tom; “and I come to warn thee.”

“Warn me of what?” said Richard.

“To warn thee as they mean to lay wait for thee, and do thee a mischief.”

“Who says so?”

“I know it,” said Tom: “so if you’ll tak’ a good bit of advice thou’lt stay at home, and not go out.”

“It’s a trick—a trap,” cried Richard. “If it were true, you’re not the man to come and tell me.”

"Why not?" said Tom bluntly.

"Because you hate me, and believe I've taken away your wretched wench."

"D—n thee!" cried Tom, seizing him by the arm and throat; and as he brought the young fellow to his knees, quite paralyzing his effort to get his hand into his breast; "thou may'st say what thee likes again me; but if thee speaks ill of her I can't bear it; so I warn thee. Hate thee I do, and yet I come to tell thee of danger, and——"

A faint shriek made Tom start, for, pale as death, Eve Pelly rushed to Richard's help, and clutched at Tom Podmore's sturdy arms, which dropped at her touch as if those of Eve had been talismanic.

"Aw raight, Miss," he said smiling. "I wean't hurt him; but I come to do him good, and he made me mad."

"Mad, yes," cried Richard, who had regained his feet, and now drew a pistol. "You were mad to come here; but I'm ready for you

and the rest of your rascally crew, and for all your malicious traps and plans.”

“Richard !” shrieked Eve, who tried to catch his arm ; but she was flung off, and would have fallen, but for Tom Podmore, before whom she stood, screening him as she begged him to leave the house.

“Yes, Miss, I’ll go,” said Tom, smiling ; “not as I’m afraid of him and his pistol. What I did he browt upon himself. I’ve done what I thowt was raight, so he must tak’ his chance. I on’y come to warn him as there’s a dozen or two of the lads as listen to Sim Slee made themselves into a gang agen him.”

“What, our workmen ?” cried Eve.

“Well, only some o’ the outsiders, Miss ; t’others wean’t have nowt to do wi’ it. That’s all.”

As he spoke he smiled sadly at the poor pale face before him, and then was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

PODMORE SEEKS AN ALLY.

TOM PODMORE walked straight away from the Big House, listening to the noise and shouting as he went to the Vicarage, where Murray Selwood was in conference with Jacky Budd, respecting certain improvements to be made in the shrubbery, when the season suited for planting.

“And what would you plant here, Budd?”
he said to the thirsty soul.

“Oh, I should put a few laurels there, sir.”

“And in that corner?”

“Oh, I should put a few *laurels* there, sir.”

“And in the centre bed?”

“A few laurels, sir.”

“And by the bare patch by the edge?”

“Just a few laurels, sir.”

“And along the side of the house?”

“Couldn’t put anything better than a few laurels, sir.”

“And for the new hedge to separate the two gardens?”

“Oh, a few laurels, sir.”

“Then you would put laurels all about?”

“Well, yes, sir; you see they’re so evergreen and—”

“Oh, here’s Podmore,” said the vicar, going down to the gate. “Well, my lad, how are you? I’m glad to see you.”

“Thanky’ kindly, sir,” said Tom, pressing firmly the hand given to him in so friendly a way. “Can I speak to you a minute?”

“Of course you can. Come into the house.”

He led the way into the vicarage, and placed a chair for Tom in the study, but the young man did not take it, and remained silent.

"I'm deeply grieved," said the vicar, laying his hand on the young fellow's shoulder ; "deeply, Tom Podmore. I had hoped that she would have come to her senses, and made a better choice."

"Don't, sir, please don't," said Tom, turning away his head ; and, laying his arm against the wall, he placed his forehead against it, and his broad shoulders heaved. "I can't bear to hear a word spoke again her, sir."

"I'll not speak against her, Podmore, believe me, poor girl ; and I deeply regret that her father was too blind to listen to me."

"You spoke to him, then ?" said Tom, sadly.

"I did ; and I have striven hard to be friends with Richard Glaire, and to bring him to a better feeling ; but I failed with both."

"Then you think as I do, sir," said Tom, sadly—"You think as she's been took away ?"

"I cannot help thinking so," was the reply. "If I am misjudging, I am very sorry ; but I

have done everything I could to trace her, even to having a man down from town, who has been constantly searching ever since she disappeared, and he has discovered nothing."

"And have you done this, sir?"

"Yes; why should I not?" said the vicar, sadly. "But you have come for some reason, Podmore. What can I do for you?"

"Well, sir, I've comed about these goings on up yonder in the town."

"There's no fresh violence, I hope," cried the vicar, hastily.

"Not as yet, sir; but there's going to be, I'm afraid. You see, sir, there's about a couple of dozen as has been got over by Sim Slee, and he's made 'em join him in some kind of brotherhood, as he calls it. The older men as has got heads on their shoulders laughs at it all, and looks upon Sim as a chattering fool."

"Fools do mischief sometimes," said the vicar, half to himself.

"Yes, sir, they do; but all the best of the

men tak' Sim Slee at what he's worth ; but there's a few, you see, as are 'mazed by his big words, and are ready to be led into any mischief."

"Yes ; and you know of this ?" said the vicar, anxiously.

"Yes, sir, I've found as they've got to know that Mr. Richard Glaire's going away to-night."

"Is he going away ?" said the vicar.

"So Sim Slee's telling on 'em, sir ; but what does it mean 'bout Sim Slee being so thick wi' him just afore, and now dead again' him ?"

"Some quarrel," said the vicar. "Sim Slee must be made to speak out somehow."

"He's been speaking to some purpose to-day," said Tom, sharply ; "and I think they mean mischief against the maister to-night, when he's going away."

"And you've come to tell me this !" said the vicar, looking at the sturdy rough young fellow admiringly.

"Yes," said Tom, simply. "I went and told him at the house, but he turned on me, and said things I couldn't bear, and made me grip him, when Miss Eve came out and atween uz, and that stopped me."

"Well?"

"And then he pulled out a pistol and threatened me."

"What made you——grip him?" said the vicar, using the young man's words.

"He—he spoke again' her," said Tom, hoarsely; and as he spoke the veins in his forehead swelled, and an angry frown came upon his countenance.

"Then you went to the house to warn Richard Glaire of his danger, and he——"

"Threatened me, and said it was a trap I was laying," said Tom.

"And then you came to tell me he was in danger. And what for?"

Tom was silent for a few moments. Then glancing up in the clear firm face which seemed

to demand an answer, he said, almost in a whisper :

“I couldn't abear for him to be knocked about, if I could stop it.”

“For Daisy's sake ?”

“For Daisy's sake,” said the young man ; and the next moment the vicar's hand had closed upon his in a firm grasp.

“Then we'll try and save him, Tom,” said the vicar quietly. “I'm very glad you've come, Tom. I've seen very little of you lately.”

Tom looked up at him curiously, said something about being much obliged, and was turning to go, when the vicar stopped him.

“We must make some plans for the poor fellow's safety,” he said. “He must not be hurt. I'll go up first, and try if I can prevail upon him not to go.”

Tom nodded.

“And if he will not be prevailed upon, we must try and act as we can. I think and hope

that they will not attempt to touch him while I am by his side."

Tom shook his head.

"I wouldn't, sir, because I know you; but time back I would, if there'd been twenty parsons round him. They won't hurt you, sir; but they'll beat him if he attempts to go."

"Let's hope not; let's hope not," said the vicar; "and now I'll go up to the house, while you'll wait here."

"Wait here?" said Tom.

"Yes; why not? I shall want to lay my hands upon you at a moment's notice. But stop. If he goes, it will be by the mail. That's at eight, and the station is two miles, say three-quarters of an hour for ample time. If he means to go, he will go afoot, so as not to excite attention."

"Yes; and he'll go by the little door in the wall at the bottom of the garden, and off across the home close," said Tom.

"Do you know that?" said the vicar.

"No, sir; but that's how he used to go to meet her; and as he's going to join her to-night, I thowt that's the way he'd go."

"Very likely," said the vicar; "and they're sure to know it, and watch. But look here, Tom Podmore, are you willing to help him get away?"

"Yes, sir."

"To join her?"

"Yes; I was thinking, that mebbe if he got away to join the poor bairn he'd marry her; for I s'pose he's fond o' the poor lass. But he must be that. She'd mak' onny man—the very worst—fond on her."

"Do you know any one you could get here to help you?" said the vicar. "I mean a stout sturdy fellow with brains, who could be depended on to help you back me up if we have to make a struggle for it."

"John Maine, sir, at Bultitude's."

"The very man. Get him here, and keep him till I come back."

“I will, sir ; but, say, parson—Mr. Selwood, sir—for the Lord’s sake don’t let Dick Glaire take that pistol thing. If they get hold of him now, they’ll beat him sore, but if he should shute a man, they’ll niver let him see the light again.”

“I’ll do my best, Podmore,” said the vicar, sadly. “You do yours.”

They parted at the gate, bound on the same mission, that of saving the man who was making them both sick at heart with the desire that they felt could never be fulfilled.

CHAPTER XIV.

JESSIE'S TROUBLES.

AFFAIRS were not very satisfactory at the farm, and Jessie's eyes more than once looked as if they had been red with crying. For the girl was greatly troubled at heart, since John Maine's behaviour puzzled her.

It was impossible for anything of note to take place in Dumford, without the news of it reaching the farm, so that she soon heard that Daisy, her old friend and school-fellow, had disappeared; that the two rough fellows who had been hanging about were supposed to have had something to do with her disappearance; while, to make matters more complicated, John Maine had been seen talking to these two men, and had afterwards warned her about holding communication with Daisy.

John Maine had always been civil and pleasant to Daisy. Daisy had more than once laughingly said she liked him. Now she was gone, John Maine's behaviour was very strange. Could he have had anything to do with getting her away, and was he in any way acting with Richard Glaire, whom some people suspected of complicity ?

No : she would not believe anything against him, come what might ; but there was some secret connected with his earlier life that he kept back, and—she could not say why—she thought he ought to be more trusting and communicative with her. Not that there was anything between them, though she told herself she thought she did like John Maine—a little.

Old Bultitude was very cross and snappish too, and he had taken it somewhat to heart that Daisy should have been the companion and friend of his Jessie.

“ See here, lass,” he said, “ thou must howd

no more communication with that bairn o' Banks's. She's a bad un."

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Jessie, "she may have been robbed and murdered."

"Not she," said old Bultitude, filling his pipe and ramming the tobacco in viciously. "If she had been, they'd ha' fun her body. Folks don't rob and murder, unless it's to get money. Daisy Banks had no money wi' her; and, as to being jealous, I hardly think Tom Podmore, as she pitched over, would murder her—but there's no knowing."

A few minutes later Eve Pelly arrived at the farm, looking pale and thin; and the two girls were soon telling each other their troubles, Eve with a quiet reticent manner; Jessie all eagerness to make the girl she looked upon as her superior the repository of her inmost thoughts.

Eve took care not to let Jessie know that this was to be almost a formal leave-taking, for she had come down after asking Mrs.

Glaire's leave, and with the full intention of yielding to her wishes.

The conversation naturally turned upon Daisy and her disappearance, when Jessie broke out impetuously with—

“Well, it's no use to keep it back, Miss Eve. I've known a deal more than I've cared to tell you, but your cousin and Daisy have for months past been thick as thick.”

“Don't speak like that, Jessie,” cried Eve, flushing up.

“I must when it's for your good, Miss Eve,” said Jessie, warmly; “and if the truth was known, I believe Mr. Richard has had her carried off to London or somewhere.”

“It is impossible, Jessie,” cried Eve. “My cousin would never be so base.”

“Well, I don't know as to that,” retorted Jessie; “it's base enough to be pretending to be engaged to one young lady, and carrying on with another.”

“Jessie!”

“Well, it’s the truth. A gentleman told me that he had often seen them together. Oh, Miss Eve, dear, I am sorry. I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

She was down on her knees before her visitor directly after, begging her pardon, and kissing her, for Eve’s face had sunk in her hands, and she was sobbing bitterly. A minute before and she was ready to fight energetically on behalf of the man who was to have been her husband, but now her defences had been turned, and she gave up.

She soon dried her eyes though, and when Jessie would have turned the conversation to another point she resumed it herself.

“I’ve been thinking about that very, very much,” she said; “night and day—night and day.”

“Poor child!” said Jessie, stroking her face. “It must be terribly hard to feel jealous.”

“No, no, no, no,” said Eve, hastily. “I did not mean that; but about poor Daisy’s dis-

appearance. You know they found her shawl and basket."

"Yes," said Jessie, nodding.

"Well," said Eve, hesitating—"don't you think it possible that anybody who hated her very much might—might——"

"Might have killed her?" said Jessie, looking at Eve strangely.

"Yes," said Eve, with a shudder.

Jessie's eyes dilated as she looked at the speaker, and thought of her uncle's words a short time before.

"It is very terrible to think on," said Jessie, slowly.

"Yes," said Eve, in an agitated voice; "but it is almost more terrible for any one you love—you care for, to be thought guilty of having taken the poor creature away."

"But who could have had any such feeling towards poor Daisy," exclaimed Jessie, "except one? and I don't think Tom Podmore——"

"Hush!" cried Eve, laying her hand upon her friend's arm, "he's coming now across the field."

"So he is," cried Jessie, starting and turning pale, for a flood of strange thoughts came across her mind. John Maine and Tom Podmore had been so intimate. John Maine had been so strange, and in his way had warned her about thinking any more of Daisy. Was that to throw her off the scent, and to keep her from grieving after and trying to find where Daisy had gone? The very room seemed to swim round for a few moments, as she recalled some mysterious acts on the part of the man she loved; and she shuddered as the idea suggested itself to her that her uncle and Eve might be right, and poor Daisy had been done to death by her old lover, with his friend for accomplice.

It was then with a feeling of relief that she saw Eve rise to go, saying:

"Let me go out through the garden, Jessie,

and then I can get into the lane without being seen by your visitor."

"Yes, yes," said Jessie, hastily; "but, dear darling Miss Eve, pray don't say what you have said to me to another soul."

"No," said Eve, sadly, "I should not do that;" and then her friend saw her out through the garden, and returned to see the young man of whom they had been speaking side by side with John Maine, in earnest conversation across the yard.

Jessie had good cause to start and think over the matters of the past few days, for a great deal of unpleasantry had taken place at the farm, all of which, when analyzed, tended to help the dreadful suspicion; and, as she thought it over, she determined in her own mind that no temptation should ever cause her to swerve, since she saw how the weakness of one vain girl had brought such misery to so many homes.

She tried to drive away the suspicion that

had been planted and replanted in her heart ; but it was of no use, and she turned at last to her own room, to have a cry to herself—a woman's fomentation for a mental pain ; but in this case it was of no avail.

Old Bultitude was morose and harsh with his labourers, going up in the tall tower-like structure which commanded a view of the old farm, and called by the builder a gazebo, but by the labourers the gozzybaw, and from here old Bultitude watched his men and found fault to a degree that Jessie felt must be caused by something out of the ordinary course, while most of his remarks had, it was plain enough, an indirect application to unfulfilled work appertaining to John Maine.

Then Tom Brough, the keeper, had managed to find his way again and again to the farm, to have long conversations with the old farmer, who made a point of asking his advice about this beast, or that cow ; about the hay off the twenty acres ; and the advisability of

thrashing out the wheat from such and such a one of the neatly-made long-backed stacks in the rick-yard.

John Maine, however, had seemed to bear this shifting of the farmer's confidence pretty fairly ; and Jessie had seen it with pain, as she whispered to herself that the true interpretation of the changes in the young man, which she had seen from day to day, was that he had something on his mind which she was not to share.

"Yes; he has something on his mind," she had said; "and he does not confide in me."

John Maine seemed to confide in no one : he only behaved strangely, night after night letting himself out, to be gone for hours, sometimes to return wet through, little thinking that he had been watched ; and that Jessie, with tears and bitterness of heart, knew all of his goings out and comings in ; and it was only by accident, and from the fact of her warning him, that he

became aware that she had more than once screened his absence.

It was one night about eleven. Everybody in the early house had gone to rest an hour and a half before, as John Maine stole downstairs softly, and was about to turn the key of a back-door, when a warm hand was laid upon his, and a voice he well knew whispered—

“If you value your home here, go back to bed. Some one has told my uncle that you go out o' nights, and he is on the watch.”

“Jessie!”

He stretched out his hands, but they only came in contact with the white-washed wall, and he knew that he was alone.

But had any one spoken, or was it only fancy? No; it was no fancy. His motions had been watched, and Jessie had come between him and trouble. As to the spy upon his actions, that was plain enough. Tom Brough had been busy, and had seen him when watching of a night, and what should he do? He had

his object for these nocturnal rambles, and he was bound to continue them, but this night he was bound to stay.

Yes, he must stay, if only for Jessie's sake ; and casting off his indecision he returned softly to his room, where he threw off his things and went to bed.

An hour slowly passed, during which he lay restless and wakeful. Then, when worn out with restless impatience, and half determined to go out at all hazards, a step was heard in the passage, a board creaked ; there was a light shining beneath the door, and then after a pause the handle was turned gently, and the light flashed in his face.

"Maine ! John Maine !" said the farmer, sharply.

"Yes ; what is it ? Anything wrong ?" said the young man, starting up.

"One of the horses seems very uneasy," said the farmer. "I'm afraid there's something wrong in the stable. I came to ask you to go

down, but he seems quieter now, and mebbe it isn't worth while. Try and keep yoursen wacken for 'bout an hour, and if you hear owt go down and see."

John Maine said he would, and old Bultitude went off, muttering to himself, while the young man lay thinking and wondering how he was to carry out his plans in the future. What was he to do? How was he to do it? The only way he could see out of the difficulty was that the burden must be thrown on the shoulders of Tom Podmore.

Day had hardly broken before John Maine, who had heard no more of the restless horse, was up, and that day, seeking out Tom Podmore, he had had a long and earnest conversation with him, with the result of getting his mind more set at ease.

And now it had come about in turn that Tom Podmore had had to seek out John Maine, to ask his help, with the result that, old Bultitude being away, his foreman just went in and

told Jessie he was going out ; and as she did not turn her face to him as he spoke, he went away sighing heavily ; while pale, and trembling, Jessie ran to the window, and, in hiding behind the blind, watched the two young men till they were out of sight.

CHAPTER XV.

A THANKLESS TASK.

MEANWHILE the vicar had missed Eve, who had taken another route, and made his way up to the big house, where he was shown into the room to find Mrs. Glaire lying, very pale and weak, upon the couch.

She apologized for not rising, and as he took her hand, he felt that it was hot and feverish.

"I ought to be the doctor," he said pleasantly, as he retained the hand. "There's too much fever here."

"No doctor will cure that," she said, with a sad smile. "I only want peace of mind, and then I shall be well; and you have come to bring more bad news."

"Oh," said the vicar, carelessly, "I only wanted a bit of a chat with your son."

“Mr. Selwood,” said Mrs. Glaire, “don’t please speak to me like that. It is dreadful to me ; and makes me feel as if I could not trust and believe in the one man in whom I wish to confide.”

“Then in heaven’s name,” he began, but she interrupted him.

“I have had faith and trust in you, Mr. Selwood, from the first day you came.”

“Then you shall continue it,” he said, firmly. “I was reticent because I thought you too ill to bear bad tidings.”

“I can bear all,” she said, softly ; “pray tell me the worst.”

“Well,” he said, quietly, “we will not talk of worst, for there is no danger that cannot be warded off.”

“If my son likes ?” said Mrs. Glaire.

“If your son likes,” continued the vicar. “The fact is, Mrs. Glaire, the people are getting furious against him, and without going into the question of right or wrong, the sufferings

of their wives and children are maddening the men. This lock-out ought to end."

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, sighing, "it ought."

"It was a dastardly trick, that destruction of the machinery, but I believe it was the work of one brain, and one pair of hands."

"Why do you think so?"

"I have had endless communications with the locked-out men, and, as far as I can judge character, I find them very rough, very independent, but, at the same time, frank and honest, and I cannot find one amongst them who does not look me full in the face with a clear unblushing eye, and say, 'Parson, if I know'd who did that dirty sneaking business, I'd half kill him.' This in these or similar words."

Mrs. Glaire bowed her head.

"Yes," she said; "you have given the men's character in those words, but they are cruelly bitter against my son."

"They are," said the vicar, hesitating to tell his news.

"And they think he has persuaded Daisy Banks to leave her home."

"Almost to a man, though her father holds out."

"Joe Banks always will be staunch," said Mrs. Glaire. "And you think with the men about that, Mr. Selwood?"

"I would rather not answer that question," he said.

"Then we will not discuss it," she replied rather hotly. "But you came to bring me some tidings, Mr. Selwood," she continued, holding out her hand. "Forgive me if I feel as a mother, and defend my son."

"I am here to defend him too," said the vicar, taking and kissing the hand extended to him; and as he did so the door softly opened, and Eve glided into the room, to half shrink back and retire; but on hearing the vicar's

words she sank into a seat as if unnerved, and the conversation went on.

"Tell me now, what is the danger?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"It is this," said the vicar; "I am firmly persuaded that this house is a sanctuary, and that for the sake of yourself and your niece, Mr. Richard Glaire is safe so long as he stays here."

"And he will stay here till I can bring him to reason about these people. I would pay the money he demands at once, but he insists that it shall be the hard earnings of his workmen themselves, and I am powerless."

"I am willing to lend the men the amount myself, but they will not take it, and I am afraid it would not be received if its source were known."

"No," said Mrs. Glaire, "you must not pay it. My son would never forgive you. But go on."

"I repeat," said the vicar, "that your son is safe while he remains here."

“And I say that he shall stay,” said Mrs. Glaire sharply. “He shall not leave. He has no intention of leaving.”

“He has made up his mind, it seems, to leave by the mail-train to-night,” said the vicar ; and as the words left his lips, and Mrs. Glaire started into a sitting position, a faint cry behind made them turn round, and the vicar had just time to catch Eve in his arms, as she was gliding to the floor.

“Poor child !” he muttered, as he held her reverently, and then placed her in a reclining chair, while a shadow of pain passed across his face, as he felt for whom this display of trouble and suffering was caused.

“It is nothing, nothing, Mr. Selwood—
aunt,” faltered Eve, fighting bravely to overcome her weakness ; “but, aunt, you will not let him go. Mr. Selwood, you will not let him be hurt.”

“No, my child, no,” he said sadly, “not if my arm can save him.”

“Thank you ; I knew you would say so, you are so brave and strong,” she cried, kissing his hand ; and as her lips touched the firm, starting veins, a strange hot thrill of excitement passed through his nerves, but only to be quenched by the bitter flood of misery that succeeded it ; and then, making a mighty effort over self, he turned to Mrs. Glaire, who was speaking :

“But are you sure—do you think it is true ?” she exclaimed.

“I believe it,” he said quietly ; “and it is absolutely necessary that he should on no pretence leave the house.”

“And who says I am to be a prisoner ?” asked Richard, entering the room.

“I, for one,” said the vicar, “if you value your safety, I may say your life.”

“And by what right do you come meddling again with my private affairs ?” said Richard, offensively.

“The right of every man who sees his

neighbour's life in danger to come and warn him."

"Then don't warn me," said Richard; "I don't want warning. It's all rubbish."

"It is no rubbish that a certain party of the men are holding meetings and threatening to injure you," said the vicar, rather warmly.

"Bah! they're always doing that, and it don't frighten me," said Richard, coarsely.

"Then you were not going, Richard?" said his mother, eagerly. "You were not thinking of being so mad?"

"Going? no; not I," said Richard, "though I don't see anything mad in it."

Eve gave a sigh of relief, which sounded like a knell to the vicar, who, however, said frankly:

"I am very glad, then, that I have been deceived."

"And," said Richard, sneeringly, "next time you hear a cock-and-bull story about me, perhaps you will keep it to yourself, sir, and leave me to go my ways in peace."

“Richard!” exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, while, with a flush of shame upon her face, Eve rose and hastily placed her hand in the vicar’s, saying softly :

“Oh, Mr. Selwood.”

Only those three words, but they were balm to him, as he pressed the soft little hand, and raised it to his lips, while, stung by this display, Richard started forward to make some offensive observation, but the door opened, and the maid appeared.

“Well, what is it?” cried Richard. “Why didn’t you knock?”

“I did, sir,” said the girl, “but you didn’t hear. Jacky Budd says, sir, he can’t carry your portmantle across the close because of the stiles, and he must take it to the station in a barrow.”

“In time for the mail-train, Mr. Glaire?” said the vicar, in spite of himself, though, for Eve’s sake, he regretted it afterwards.

“D——n!” snarled Richard. “No,—go away. Such fools.”

He ground his teeth and stamped about the room, while Mrs. Glaire's eyes sought those of the vicar, and in her apologetic look he read plainly enough the mother's shame for the graceless boy she had brought into the world.

The look of triumph passed from his countenance as rapidly as it had come, as he caught a glance of sorrow and appeal from Eve, which seemed to say, "Forgive him, and save him against himself."

"You will give up all thought of going now, Mr. Glaire," he said, quietly. "Of course you wished to keep your departure a secret; but you see the intelligence reached me, and is now perhaps the property of the whole town."

"Through you?" said Richard, recovering himself, and speaking with a cunning sneer upon his face.

"This is no time for sneers, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, calmly. "The information was brought to me direct from the meeting."

"By one of your spies?"

“By one of the workmen whom I have made my friend, and whom you have made your enemy ; and he sends me as his messenger to pour coals of fire upon your head, saying, ‘Save this man, for if he goes out to-night it may be at the cost of his life.’ Mr. Glaire, you will not go now?”

“Not go!” roared Richard, bringing his fist down heavily upon the table. “But I will go. Look here ; I start from this house at seven o’clock to catch the mail-train ; now go and tell the scoundrels you have made your friends—the men you have encouraged in their strike against me.”

“I encouraged them?” said the vicar, smiling at the absurdity of the charge, when he had striven so bravely for peace.

“Yes ; you who have fed their wives and children, and lent them money so as to enable them to hold out against me—you, whose coming has been a curse to the place, for you have fostered the strike from the beginning.”

“There is no time to argue that, Mr. Glaire,” said the vicar, quietly; “and let me advise you once more. Give up this foolish idea of leaving, if not for your own sake, for that of your mother and your cousin here.”

“I shall not,” cried Richard. “I have made my arrangements, and I shall go, and let the blood of the man be on his own head who tries to stop me.”

“As you will,” said the vicar, calmly, as he turned to go.

“Mr. Selwood!”

“Mr. Selwood!”

The two women appealed to him in a breath, but he did not look at them, merely fixed Richard with his eyes, as he said quietly:

“Then you must be saved against your will.”

The next minute he was gone.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

THE street was getting pretty full of people as the vicar walked sharply back towards his house, but they were all remarkably quiet. Sim Slee was there, but he turned off down a side lane, and there was this ugly appearance in their mien, that those who generally had a nod and smile for him refused now to meet the vicar's eye.

He knew it would be madness to try and persuade Sim's party against their plans, and only so much wasted time, so he contented himself with preparing his own, and, to his great satisfaction, found Tom Podmore and his other ally in waiting.

As he was passing the Bull and Cucumber

though, Robinson, the landlord, made a sign to him that he wished to speak, and the vicar went up to him.

“ Ah, Robinson, how’s your wife ? ”

“ She’s a very poor creature, sir. She coot her hand the other day with a bit of pot—old cheeny, and it’s gone bad. She hasn’t looked so bad ta year as she does now.”

“ I’m sorry to hear this.”

“ It’s a bad job, sir, for she can’t side the room, or remble the kitchen things, or owt. She tried to sile the milk this morning, and had to give it up, and let the lass do it instead.”

“ Sile the milk ? ” said the vicar. “ Ah, you mean strain it ? ”

“ Ah, wi’ uz,” said the landlord, “ we always call it sile. We strain a thing through a temse.”

“ Oh, do you ? ” said the vicar, wondering whether there was any connection between temse and tammies or tammy cloth. “ But

you were going to say something important to me, were you not?"

"Well, I weer, sir; only I shouldn't like it to seem to ha' come from me. Fact is, I were down at bottom o' the close in the bit of a beck, picking some watter cress for tea, and fine and wetcherd [wet shod] I got, when, as I was a stooping there, I heered Master Sim Slee cooming along wi' two or three more, and blathering about; and I heerd him talking o' you and Master Dicky Glaire, and it were plain enew that they was makking some plans, and not for good, mind you. I hadn't going to tell tales out o' school, but if you'd keep at home to-night, parson——"

"You fancy there's mischief brewing?" said the vicar, sternly.

"Well, yes, sir, I do," said the landlord. "You see, the men hold a kind of lodge or brotherhood meeting at my place, and I can't help knowing of some o' their doings."

"Well, Mr. Robinson, if mischief is brewing,

it's my business to try and spoil the brew ; so I am going out to-night, and if you've any respect for me, you'll come and help me in my task."

He hurried on, and a short time after, the landlord saw him go by, with Tom Podmore and John Maine following at a short distance.

"Parson's a chap with brains in his head," said the landlord. "He's got a couple o' good bull-dogs to tramp at his heels ; and, dal me, if they aint beckoned Big Harry to 'em. Well, I'll go too. I aint going to faight ; but if I see any man hit parson, dal me, but I'll gi'e him a blob."

The vicar was not without hope that Richard would think better of the matter, and keep indoors, and after a turn or two up and down the street, which was pretty well thronged, the men looking stolid and heavy, but civilly making way for him, and always with a friendly word, it seemed as if there was nothing to fear, when from the lane at the side

of the Big House there came a loud shout, and in an instant the whole of the men in the High Street seemed galvanised into life.

The vicar made for the lane, and had nearly reached it, when he saw Richard Glaire hatless and with his coat half-ripped from his back, rush out, pursued by shout and cry ; and before the vicar and his little band of followers could get up, the young man was surrounded by a knot of men striking at him savagely, one of them hitting up the hand that held a pistol, which exploded, the bullet striking the opposite wall far over the heads of his assailants, and the weapon then fell to the ground.

A storm of furious cries arose, above which was a wild shriek from one of the windows of the big house—a shriek that sent two-fold vigour to the vicar's arms, as he struggled with the crowd that kept him back.'

"Quick, Tom ! Maine ! Harry !" he cried. "Now, a rush together," he said, as they forced themselves to his side ; and with all their

might they made for the spot where Richard Glaire seemed to be undergoing the fate of being torn to pieces, for he was now stripped to shirt and trousers, and his face was bleeding; but, literally at bay, he fought savagely for his life.

The dash made by Mr. Selwood saved him for the time, for though the vicar and his followers, with whom was now the landlord, did not reach the young man, they rent the crowd of assailants so as to make an avenue for him to escape, and he darted off at full speed towards the vicarage.

"My house, Glaire," shouted the vicar. "No, the church," amidst the storm of yells and cries, as he tried to fight his way free.

"After him, lads!" cried the shrill voice of Sim Slee; "and down wi' them as interferes."

"Dal me, if I don't feel the brains of any man as hurts parson," cried the stentorian voice of one of the ringleaders. "Howd him, boys,

and them others too. Give up, parson : it's no good to faight for that blaguard."

"If you are men and not cowards—" shouted the vicar, but his voice was drowned, he was seized by three men who held him good-temperedly enough in spite of his struggles, and with sinking heart, he found himself separated from his followers, Big Harry being down with six men sitting on him to quell the mighty heaves he gave to set himself free.

"We wean't hurt thee, parson," said one of the men who kept him and his fellows prisoners. "See there, lads!"

He went down like a shot, for, by a clever twist learnt in wrestling, the vicar upset him on to the men holding Harry, and then by a mighty effort set himself at liberty, so staggering his captors that Harry got free as well. Then there was a charge, and Tom Podmore was up, and these three ran down the street after the crowd who pursued Richard.

"Harry, my lad! Tom, stick to me," cried

the vicar, panting for breath. "I shall never forgive myself or be forgiven if harm comes to that young man," he added to himself; and then dashing on with about as unclerical an aspect as was possible, he rapidly gained on Richard's pursuers, with Tom behind him, and Big Harry lumbering like an elephant at his heels.

Meanwhile the whole town was at the windows or in the streets; children were crying and women shrieking, while the more prudent tradespeople were busily putting up their "shuts." As for Richard, he had gone off like a hunted hare, doubling here and there to avoid the blows struck at him, and more than once it seemed as if he would escape; but the men had taken their steps well, and knowing that he would make for the station road, there was always a picket ready to cut him off, and drive him back to run the gauntlet afresh.

He had not heard the vicar's words, which were drowned by the savage hoots and yells,

mingled with curses upon him, from half-starved women ; but, oddly enough, he made straight for the house of the very man whom he hated, and nearly reached it, but was headed back, and fainting and exhausted, he only escaped capture by a clever double, by leaping a hedge, crossing the vicarage garden, and leaping another hedge, landing in the pasture-land leading towards Joe Banks's cottage, the vicarage standing at the apex formed by the roads leading to Ranby and the open land.

This double made a number of his pursuers run round by the road, and gave time to the vicar and his followers to close up to the hunted man.

“ Make for the church,” cried the vicar, who was close behind now ; but his words were unheeded. All he could do was to get nearly behind the young man, determined to turn and face the crowd when they came up ; but Richard, maddened with fear, paid no heed to

advice, his breath was failing, he tottered, and was ready to fall; the pursuers gained upon them, and at last seeing the harbour, the hunted man dashed through the gate, in at Joe Banks's open door, closely followed by the vicar, Tom, and Big Harry, and then stood at bay in the farthest corner.

“Help, quick! Banks, help!” cried the vicar hoarsely, and recovering from his astonishment, the foreman picked up the heavy poker, and joined the little rank of defenders, a swing of the iron forming a space which none of those who crowded into the room, and darkened door and window as they thronged the garden, dared to cross.

“Stand back, you cowards!” cried the foreman, flushing with rage, and forgetting his own trouble in the excitement of the moment.

“Gi’e him up! drag him out!” was roared.

“A hundred on you to four!” cried Joe. “Stand back, or I’ll brain the first man who comes near.”

"We don't want to hurt thee, Joe Banks," cried a voice. "Nor the parson, nor the others; but we wean't go wi'out Richard Glaire."

"Back! every man of you," cried the vicar. "Shame, cowards, shame!"

"Aw raight, parson," cried another. "It's cowardly mebbe, but we mean to hev him aw the same."

"If you hev him, you'll hev to tak' me first," cried Joe Banks, fiercely. "You, Big Harry, hev the legs out o' that deaf Tommy table, and gi'e one apiece to Parson and Tom."

The men tried to stop him, but a swing from Joe's poker sent them back, and the Hercules of the hammer seized the little three-legged table, shattered it in a moment, and armed his companions with the thick heavy cudgels that had formed its supports.

"Now, lads, we're ready for you," said Joe, grimly. "Hit hard at the first as tries to lay a finger on the maister."

There was a groan at this, taken up from without, those in the garden clamouring at those within to drag out Dicky Glaire.

“Down wi’ him, lads ; down wi’ him,” cried a high-pitched voice ; and Sim Slee, panting with his exertions, partly edged his way and partly was lifted in.

“I’ll down wi’ thee, thou prating fool !” cried Joe fiercely. “Are ye men, to listen to that maulkin ?”

“Yes, they are,” cried Sim ; “and you’re an owd fool to faight.”

“Shall we try to drive them out, Banks ?” whispered the vicar.

“No good,” said Joe, sturdily. “Let’s hear what they’ve gotten to say ; it’ll give you and the others breath, and mebbe by that time the maister can faight a bit, too. I’m an owd fool, am I ?” he said, “eh, Sim Slee ?”

“Yes ; to faight for the man as has gotten away thee bairn.”

“Thou lies, thou chattering jay,” cried the

old man furiously ; "say it again, and I'll brain thee."

"I do say it again," cried Sim, who was quite out of the foreman's reach. "It's true, aint it, lads?"

"Yes, yes, he's gotten her away."

"It's a lie," cried Joe Banks again. "Tell 'em, Maister Dick ; tell the cowards they lie."

"Yes, yes," said Richard hoarsely, as he stood now leaning against the wall, bathed in perspiration, bleeding, ragged, haggard, and faint. "I have not got her away."

"Thee lies, Dick Glaire," shrieked Sim. "He paid me to get her away, and I wouldn't do it."

"It's false," cried Richard again, as he looked round at his fierce pursuers, and then at the doors and windows for a way of escape.

"It's true," cried Sim, exultantly. "It's my turn now, Dick Glaire. Yow'd smite me and coot me feace for not doing thee dirty work, will ta ? Now harkye here, lads, at this."

He drew a piece of paper from his pocket, and read aloud :—

“Be ready at nine to-night. She’ll join you by the gate of Lamby’s close ; then straight off with her to the station, take your tickets, as I told you, to London, and stay with her at the address I gave you till I come.”

“Now then, Joe Banks,” he said, holding out the note, “whose writing’s that ?”

“It’s a lie—a forgery,” cried Richard, whose face now was of a sickly green.

Joe Banks passed his hand before his face, and seemed dazed for a moment ; then, catching at the note, he took a candle from the drawers on which it stood, and, as he did so, Richard started forward, and made a snatch at the paper, but a menacing movement on the part of the crowd made him start back, while the vicar looked from face to face, and saw Tom Podmore’s stern scowl, and the fire gathered in Joe Banks’s eyes.

"He'll murder him," he said to himself; and, shifting his position, he got between Joe and Richard Glaire.

"Hold your tongue, for your life," he whispered to the trembling man. "Your only chance is to beg for his mercy : for his child's sake. Daisy must be your wife."

"Curse you !" cried Richard, through his teeth. "You were always against me."

Then he shrank back trembling against the wall, as in the midst of profound silence, the old man read the letter straight through.

"Who gi'e thee this, Sim Slee?" he said twice in a husky voice.

"Dicky Glaire."

"No, no," gasped Richard; "a lie—a lie. It's a forgery. I did not get away Daisy Banks; so help me God, I didn't, Joe."

"Damn thee for a liar !" cried the old man, furiously; and before the vicar could prevent him, he had Richard by the throat, and down upon his knees, faintly protesting his inno-

cence. "It's no forgery. It's thee own false writing same as these," he cried; "your cursed love-letters to my poor bairn."

He tore a bundle of notes from his breast, notes Richard had warned poor Daisy to burn, but which the weak girl had treasured up in secret, to be found in her room when she had gone.

"Look!" he cried, as he held Sim Slee's fatal note of instructions out beside the others; "are these lies and forgeries? Mebbe you think I'll believe thee now, as I've troosted thee throughout. Didn't I think thou wert thy poor owd father's honest son—the gentleman he had tried to mak' thee? Didn't I stand by thee when all ta town was again thee, fowt for thee, looked on thee as my son, and you turn and sting me like a cowardly snake in the grass?"

"He did, Joe, he did," cried a voice in the crowd, as they stood back now, content to watch for the punishment that should fall on

their enemy, while Sim Slee, the man who had betrayed him, smiled like a despicable modern Judas, gloating in the revenge he was taking on the employer who had struck him in the face.

“D—n thee, be silent!” roared Joe, as, with a wild look of fury, he seized the poker as if to strike, and Richard crouched to the ground, and uttered a shriek of dread.

“For God’s sake, Banks!” cried the vicar, catching at his arm, but unable to stay him. “Man, are you mad?”

“A’most, parson,” he said, turning on him. “Thou told me to tak’ care; thou gave me fair warning ’bout it all, and like a fool—no, like a man who wouldn’t believe it—I turned upon thee when thou wast raight, for I couldn’t and wouldn’t believe he was such a liar and villain. Look at him, lads, look at the cold-blooded snake, as could stoop to ruin a poor trustin’ fool of all he held dear in life, and now all he has to say is a lie.”

"I am innocent, Joe, indeed," cried the young man.

"Thou lies," cried Banks, furiously; and he raised his weapon again, but only to dash it into the fireplace. Then, stooping, he caught the shivering man by the throat, dragged him up, and held him against the wall, while not a sound was heard but the panting of breath, and the hoarse mutterings of the stricken father.

"Banks, Banks!" cried the vicar imploringly.

"Let me be, parson, let me be," he said in a low voice. "Thou'rt a good man, and may trust me." Then aloud, "Richard Glaire, I'm a poor, half-broken workman, and thou'st robbed me."

"No, no," panted Richard, "Mr. Selwood, Harry, Podmore, help!"

"Silence," cried Joe Banks; "we've gotten thee, and thou tries to hide it all by lying. I've

gotten thee, though, now, and my eyes are opened to it all. I could strangle thee where thou stands; but I promised thee father I'd stand by thee, and I have again all men, as know'd thee for what thou wast. But I can't do it now, and kill, perhaps, every hope of my poor bairn, so come."

He caught the young man tightly by the collar, and waved the others aside, so that they fell back before him as he went out unmolested with his prisoner into the starlit lane, and stood the centre of the crowd—now at a respectful distance.

"My lads," he said, aloud, while the vicar, who had signed to his companions to be ready, stood with every muscle strained to spring forward and try to save the shivering man from violence. "My lads, this man's done you all a bad turn, but most of all to me."

There was a murmur of acquiescence at this.

"I've always fowt for ye when I could, but I've always stuck to the maister," continued

Joe, in a low, hoarse voice that was terrible in its earnestness.

“You hev, Joe, you hev,” was murmured, for the men were impressed by the terrible earnestness of the old foreman.

“I’ve gotten something to ask of ye, then,” said Joe.

“What is it?”

“Let me hev the punishment of this man—this cold-blooded villain.”

“Yes, yes,” rose like a whirlwind.

“And you’ll leave him to me?” said Joe, through his teeth.

“Yes, yes.”

“Joe, oh Joe, what are you going to do?” wailed his wife, coming panting up, having returned from the next town by the train by which Richard Glaire had meant to leave.

“Thou shalt see, moother,” said Joe quietly; “I’m going to punish the thief that stole our bairn.”

“But, Joe!” cried Mrs. Banks piteously.

“Howd thee tongue, and see,” he cried sternly. “Richard Glaire, thou’rt a damned villain, but I can’t strike down the man my poor bairn has clasped in her poor weak arms. The way’s open to thee : go, and God’s mercy be held from thee if thou dost not make my poor child amends.”

Richard Glaire tried to speak, but his tongue refused its office, and he looked, shivering, from one to the other, as the stern old man stood pointing up towards the town, while the men who, but a short time before, were ready to tear and trample him under foot, stood back right and left, leaving an open lane for him to pass.

“Banks, God bless you !” whispered the vicar, catching the old man’s hand.

“And you too, parson,” said the other, simply. “Mebbe you’ll tak’ him home.”

The help was needed, for Richard Glaire tottered as his arm was drawn through the vicar’s; and then, followed by Tom Podmore

and the big hammerman, they passed unmolested through the crowd, to find another further on, consisting of the women of the place, who had restrained the frantic mother and Eve Pelly from following; and the latter was kneeling now in the midst of a knot of women beside poor Mrs. Glaire.

“Lift her and carry her home, Harry,” said the vicar; and the great fellow raised Mrs. Glaire like a babe. “Podmore, I leave Miss Pelly to you. Somebody ask Mr. Purley to come on to the house at once. Quick. By Jove, he has fainted!”

These latter words were to himself, as Richard Glaire staggered and would have fallen but for the vicar’s hold; and lifting him on his own shoulder, he led the strange procession till they entered the house, where he stayed with his two stout companions, John Maine going home, to keep guard with the police, who now arrived after being locked in the station and kept there by the men.

But there was no need, for the eruption was over, and the night's silence was only broken by Richard's moans as he lay there bruised and sore, mad almost against his men, and ready to rail at the whole world for the injuries he had received.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DECEITFUL CALM.

AFTER the storm came a calm, during which there was magisterial talk in the neighbourhood to which reports of the proceedings had extended, of sending for the military, of having additional police force in the town; and then, as Richard Glaire made no movement, as no property was destroyed, and the injury was confined to one man, the affair began to be looked upon as an ordinary assault.

A good deal of this was due to the fact that trade troubles were not uncommon, and so long as the policemen were not forced into taking action by the magnitude of the offence, they found it better to close their eyes to the proceedings, and not to interfere "till somebody called murder." In the riot in question

the police had been good-humouredly locked up, and kept prisoners, as their captors said, laughing, "so as not to spoil their uniforms;" and, after a show of resistance, when they were informed that the lads were "only going to serve sum'un out," they came to the conclusion that the majesty of the law, as represented by two officials, was no match for a hundred and fifty excited men, and waited patiently till the affair was over.

The clerk of the two made his report, and waited on Richard Glaire, who, being swathed and bandaged, and very sore, told him to go to the devil.

Then the constable asked him if he should get warrants out against anybody—this at Richard Glaire's bedside.

"Yes, if you like," growled Richard.

"Will you give me their names, sir?" said the man.

"How can I give you their names, when I don't know them? It was the whole pack."

“But what am I to do, sir?” said the man, scratching his head.

“Get out!” said Richard. “Wait till I’m better.”

The constable saw the vicar downstairs, and tried him for names, but with no better success; and the representative of law and order in the little out-of-the-way town went back in no wise dissatisfied, for any action against so strong a body of men would have been exceedingly unpleasant, and not at all conducive to his future comfort amongst those whom he looked upon as neighbours.

The search, too, for Daisy Banks ceased after the attack on Richard, for on all sides the police were met with the same mocking question, “Hev you asked Dick Glaire where she is?”

In fact, it was now an acknowledged fact that Richard Glaire was answerable for her whereabouts, and no amount of denial had the slightest effect on the people of Dumford.

Jacky Budd shook his head, looked red-nosed,

and said nothing, but implied a great deal. In fact, Jacky was in great request, and was asked to take a good deal to drink in the shape of gills of ale by gossips wishful to know how matters went on at the Big House, where Richard Glaire was at first a prisoner perforce, and later on from choice.

Everybody said that Jacky Budd was as great a "shack" as Sim Slee; but, like that worthy, it was his harvest time, and he was of great importance in the place.

Not that he had much to report, but he dressed up his meagre bits of knowledge, and hinted that the vicar was forbidden the house.

"Young Dicky said he'd shute him if he come on the premises again."

"Why?" said some one.

"Why," replied Jacky, with a wince, "because he's jealous of him; thinks he wants the owd woman."

This report reached the ears of Miss Purley, who immediately put on her bonnet, and went

down the street to Miss Primgeon, taking tea with that lady, whom she kissed affectionately for the first time since the vicar's arrival; and Miss Primgeon called her "dear," and kissed her also affectionately, confidences growing to such an extent that Miss Primgeon brought out and showed a pair of braces she had been embroidering for somebody; and, in return, Miss Purley displayed the crown of a smoking-cap in purple velvet, with "a dicky bird" in white beads, sitting on a crimson floss silk twig; and then both ladies called each other "dear" again, and shed tears on the top of the smoking-cap and over the braces, re-embroidering them as it were with pearls, while they talked of the terribly fragile nature of human hopes, the weakness of man, and the artfulness of elderly widows.

The quantity of tea changed by a process of natural chemistry into tears that night was something astounding before the ladies separated.

Sim Slee was in high feather, too, and reached home several nights in a glorified state, spending some little time before retiring to rest in performing strange acts in his stocking feet.

Mrs. Slee always waited up for him on her return from the vicarage, and generally gave him what he termed "a tongue thrashing for nowt."

"Coming home in such a state!" she'd exclaim. "Wher ha' ye been goozening to now? What would the parson say?"

"I don't care nowt for parson or anybody, and what do you mean with your state. I've ony been as far as the corner."

At such times Sim would pull off his boots with some difficulty, for he had the peculiarity of being perfectly sober as far as his waist, while his legs would be in such a disgraceful state of intoxication that he did not reach home without their throwing the upper part of his body several times on the ground. The boots being removed, Sim would sit before the

fire talking to himself, and working his toes about in his coarse knitted stockings.

“Why can’t you put on your slippers, Sim?”

Mrs. Sim would say.

“I wean’t,” he’d answer. “I’m not going to be ordered about by a woman. I’m a man.”

“You’re a nasty drunken pig,” exclaimed Mrs. Slee.

“What!” he would say indignantly, “drunk! Heven’t had a glass. I never have a bit o’ peace o’ my life. Tant-tant-tant all day long, driving me away from home. Ugh, you know nowt but nastiness. You always weer nasty. Go to bed.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIM SLEE'S PATRIOTISM.

THEN Mrs. Slee would tighten up her lips, look as if she would like to box her lord's ears, and end sometimes by doing it, Sim appealing to "Moother" for mercy till she went upstairs, when Sim would get up from the floor, where he had thrown himself, and rub his ears till they ceased tingling, and end by winking to himself and performing the strange movements alluded to in the previous chapter.

At these times, in spite of the very liberal quantity of ale indulged in at his own and other people's expense, Sim's head would be perfectly clear; and knowing, from old experience, that as soon as he had lain down and gone fast asleep, Mrs. Slee would get up and

empty his pockets, he would proceed to conceal his money. Half-crowns were placed up the chimney, a half-sovereign on the ledge over a door, shillings in corners not likely to be swept, under chimney ornaments, and on the tops of picture frames, his great hoard at this time being under an old scrubby geranium, growing—or rather existing, for it had long ceased to grow—in a pot in the window—a favourite plant of Mrs. Slee's, as she had kept it through the winter for years. So matted together were its roots, that if the stem were taken in the hand the whole of the earth came out quite clean in its basket of fibres, and beneath this, in the bottom of the pot, Sim had placed five golden sovereigns, nicely arranged round the hole, on the night after the riot, the geranium being replaced, and all looking as before.

The next morning Mrs. Slee was up a long while the first, as usual, and as was her custom when Sim had been bad over night, she made

a tour of the place, finding and gleaning up coins of various value, wondering the while where Sim obtained the money that she transferred to her ample pocket, hidden by drapery and folds at a great depth from the surface.

Just as she was finishing, she caught sight of the pot, and saw that it had been removed over night, for the water that had drained into the earthen saucer had, when the pot was moved, dripped on the floor.

A grim smile overspread her countenance as she lifted pot and saucer together, and looked beneath, to see nothing. Even the pot was lifted from the saucer, and with like result, when, replacing it, the wet pot slipped, and Mrs. Slee caught at the stem of the plant, with the result that she held geranium in one hand, pot in the other, and saw the five glittering gold pieces at the bottom.

She clutched them eagerly, and hid them away, replaced the pot, and then stood thinking.

“Where does he get his money?” she said, looking grimly. “I’ll speak to parson.”

Mrs. Slee had been gone a couple of hours before Sim descended to partake of the breakfast placed ready for him, all the while battling with his infirmity.

It was one that always troubled him after a night’s excess, for, though Sim’s head was clear enough over night when he hid his money, the over-excited brain refused to act next morning, and a thick veil was drawn between the eve and the morrow. There was always the dim recollection of having hidden his money, but that was all; and in this case as in others, pot, door-ledge, pictures, all had passed away from his memory, and there was a blank in answer to his oft-repeated question—

“Where did I put that money?”

It was a blessing in disguise for Sim, though he did not know it. But for this, and his wife’s tenacious grasp of all she found, none of which

went directly back to Sim, he would have been without a roof to cover his head years before, and many a pound that he accredited himself with having spent in gills of ale and standing treat had really gone into his wife's pocket.

"Well, this wean't do," he said at last; "money's gone, and I shall get no more out o' Dicky Glaire.

"He'll be pretty sick o' his lock-out by this time," said Sim, as he laced his boots. "That was a fine plan wi' them bands. It's kep the strike on, and it's easier than wucking your fingers to the bone. Wonder how long they'll keep it oop. Well, here goes."

He went out, and had not gone far before he met the vicar, who stopped to speak to him; but Sim, to use his own words, "coot him dead," making his way right off through the town, where he stopped for a bit of bombastic "blather," as his associates called it, on the success of their attack on Richard.

"He had the finest leathering he ever had in his life," said Sim.

"And what good's it going to do?" said one of the men, in a grumbling tone.

"What good? Open thee eyes, mun, and see for your sen. Good? It'll bring him to his senses, and he'll come round and ask on his knees for us to go to work, and then we'll mak' our own terms."

"And if he wean't come round," said another, "what then?"

Sim stooped to the man's ear, and whispered something.

"Eh, mun, but we wouldn't do that, would we?"

"Howd thee tongue," said Sim. "Wait and see. I've got a friend coming down to-day as can settle all these things. I'm going to meet him at the station, and he's going to stay here till things is settled."

"And who's going to keep un?" said another man. "I can't keep mysen."

"All on you, o' course," said Sim. "You keep a good heart, lad, and all will be as raight as raight."

"But that would be coming it strange and strong, mun," said the first speaker.

"Strong diseases want strong doses, lad," said Sim, winking. "But don't you wherrit yoursen. There's them in the Brotherhood as is looking after your interests, and we shall all come off wi' flying colours."

"I dessay we shall," said the man, in a discontented tone; "but I want to hear them theer furnaces a-roaring agen, and the fire-men's shovels rattling in the coals, and the brass a-chinking in the box o' pay nights. Dal the strike, I say."

"But it aint a strike now," said Sim, didactically. "Don't you see, it's a lock-out."

"It's all the same," said another, sulkily. "Theer aint no brass to tak', and the missus and the bairns is pined to dead wi' hunger, and starved to dead for want of a bit o' fire."

"But you get the society money," said Sim, indignantly.

"Yah! what's that to a man in full fettle! Just pays for bread, and you can't buy a decent weigh o' meat for fear o' waring it all at once."

"Yes," said another; "it's like club money when a man's sick and can't wuck."

"Raight enew, then," said another; "bud a man wants wuck as well as something to yeat. It's strange, coarse weather for us as far as yeating and drinking goes. Why, my bairns heven't hed a bit of bootther sin' the strike begun."

"A man need be as tiff as a band to stand it all," said another.

"Ay, tough as a bont whong," said another.

"Well, I shall be a very poor creature," said another, "if this here's going to last. I'm 'bout pined to dead now."

"I shall flit and get wuck somewheer else."

"Iver get berry pie for dinner now, Sim

Slee?" said another, alluding to a favourite luxury of Sim's, who was accredited with having stolen a neighbour's gooseberries to make the famous berry pie.

Here there was a bit of a laugh, a good sign, for the men seemed ripe for mischief.

"His missus gives him tongue for breakfast ivery morning," said another.

"Sim, come home wi' uz and hev a bit o' custard," said another, and there was a general laugh from the gaunt-looking men.

"Nice bit o' stuffed chine at my place, Sim," said another; and one after the other, men, whose fare had been bread and potatoes for many days, gave their great orator invitations to partake of the popular delicacies of the place.

"Tellee what," said big Harry, coming up, "I mean to have somebody's thack off if this game arn't soon over."

"I hadn't going to say much," said Sim, who had been standing with folded arms,

looking contemptuously at the crowd around ;
“but, I say this—if I was to go on as you do
I'd hate mysen. Wheer's your paytriotism ?
Wheer's your risings against tyranny ? Wheer's
your British wucking man rising like a lion in
his might ? ”

“Yes,” said a shrill female voice from a
window, “but your British lion wucking man
wants his dinner, don't he ? ”

There was a roar of laughter at this.

“Yah ! ” said Sim, contemptuously. “Why
do I wuck mysen to death for you all, to be
badgered for it ? ”

“I don't know,” said the same voice from
the window, sounding more shrill than ever,
“but I know this, Sim Slee, that my bairns
is all pining, while their father's doing nowt
but walk about wi' his hands in his pockets,
and if things don't soon change, some o' them
as got up this strike 'll be put oonder the
poomp, and if the men don't do it uz women
will.”

Sim folded his arms, looked round contemptuously as there rose another shout of laughter, and stalked off to walk to the station and meet the deputation, as he called the man he had invited to come down.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FOREMAN'S APOLOGY.

THERE was, indeed, a calm, but to the vicar it seemed a very deceitful one, and he spent many an uneasy hour in thinking whether it was likely when the men grew excited they would attack the house; but he always came back to the conclusion that Richard would be safe there, so long as he did nothing more to exasperate his workmen.

DURING visits to the house, Mrs. Glaire, with tears, avowed that she could do nothing, only hope, for Richard was stubbornness itself, and when for a moment he thought of inducing Eve to play the part of intercessor, the poor girl's wan and piteous look pained him so that he could not ask her, and it was brought thoroughly home to him that she must love

Richard very dearly, though now they were cruelly estranged; and as he sat and gazed upon her, and grew more and more intimate, learning the sweet truth of her nature, and thorough self-denial, he felt half maddened to think she should be thrown away upon such a man, and told himself that he would gladly have seen her wedded to any one to escape so terrible a union.

The past and Daisy Banks were quite ignored. She was a trouble that had come upon the mother and cousin's life, but she was removed apparently from their path, unless some of the letters Richard so regularly wrote were for her.

Murray felt his position in connection with the family acutely. The rumour spread by Budd as to his being forbidden the house was false, but scarcely a day passed when Richard came down, after indulging himself a week in bed to cure ills from which he really did not suffer, but for which stout Mr. Purley doctored

him stolidly, and made his sister enter them in the day-book when he got home—scarcely a day passed without the vicar having to submit to some insult.

He would have stayed away, but for Mrs. Glaire, who looked to him for her support in this time of trouble ; and he would have avoided Eve's society, dear to him as it was, but for the sweet ingenuous looks with which she greeted him, and laid bare her innocent, truthful heart to his gaze. To her he was dear Mr. Selwood, whose hands she had kissed when he promised her to leave no stone unturned to bring Richard to the path of duty ; and her belief in him was, that with his strong mind and knowledge of the world, he would do this, that Richard would be quite reformed ; and make her, to her aunt's lasting happiness, a good and loving husband.

And she—does she love him ? the vicar often asked himself, and he was compelled to answer, “ No ! ”

For there was no deep passion, only the sorrow for Richard's frailties, the disappointment and bitterness of the young girl, who finds the man to whom she is betrothed is a scoundrel, and fights with self to keep from believing it. No, Eve did not love him with all her heart, for a true love passion had never yet gained an entrance. Richard was to be her husband; that was settled; and some day, when he showed his sorrow and repented, she would forgive him, and become his wife.

And had she the least idea that another loved her?

Not the least. Mr. Selwood was her and her aunt's dear friend, working with them for the same end, and some day in the future, when Richard was forgiven, he would make them man and wife.

This was the state of Eve's heart at the present period of the story; but a change was coming—a look, a word, or a touch, something had thrilled one of the fibres of Eve's being,

directly after the saving of Richard from his men ; and, though innocent of its meaning, the first germ of a thought which she came afterwards to term "disloyal to Richard," was planted in her heart, and began to grow.

The vicar was at home, busy over his garden. It had been a busy morning, and Mrs. Slee had informed him that she was "dead bet." And she must have been tired, for fully a hundred people had been for relief that morning, the munificent sums the young vicar devoted to the workmen's families having been of late supplemented by money furnished by Mrs. Glaire.

"Richard must never know," she said ; "but I feel bound to do something towards alleviating the distress caused by his obstinacy."

The result was that soup and bread were supplied, and no one came to the vicarage without getting some assistance.

"Thee'll give all thee's got away, and leave

nowt for thee sen," said Mrs. Slee to him crossly, when the distribution was over, and the people gone.

"You're tired," said the vicar, smiling.

"Nay, I'm not," said Mrs Slee; "but it makes me mad."

"What makes you mad?"

"Why, to see you finding money, and trouble, and me helping you, to keep the poor silly women and bairns from pining, when my maister's doing all he can to keep the men from going to work. It makes me hate my sen."

"Well, but we can't help it, Mrs Slee."

"No," she retorted; "but half of them don't deserve it."

"If we waited to be charitable till only those who deserved it came, Mrs. Slee, you need not make so much soup, and shins of beef would not be so scarce."

"You're raight theer, sir," said Mrs Slee, speaking a little less vinegary to the man whom, in spite of her short, snappish ways,

she almost worshipped, and would do anything to serve. In fact, Mrs. Slee had, since her instalment as housekeeper to the vicar, grown less angular and pasty of face, even approaching to her old comeliness. Not from idleness, though, for the neat maidservant, who was her assistant, had almost a sinecure for place, Mrs. Slee insisting on making bread, cooking, "rembling" and "siding," as she termed it; in short, she monopolized nearly the whole of the work, and the place was a model of neatness and perfection.

"One's obliged to do the best one can, Mrs. Slee, and be content to leave the working and result to wiser hands."

"Oh yes, sir, that's raight enew; but it makes me mad for all them big owry fellows to be idle 'bout a quarrel, and their missusses looking all poor creatures, and their bairns as wankle as wankle for want o' better food, when there ought to be bacon and pig cheer and ony mander o' thing they want. It's

time some on 'em give ower, instead o' leaving their wives scratting about to keep body and soul together."

"I keep hoping matters will mend," said the vicar.

"Here's some un else to wherrit you," said Mrs Slee, hearing the gate bang. "Why, I never saw such a sight in my life. It's Joe Banks."

The vicar was surprised, and rose as Joe Banks, looking years older, was shown in by Mrs. Slee, who counteracted her longing to know his business by hurriedly going out, making her way into the kitchen, and attacking a pancheon of dough, which had been put to the fire to rise, and was now ready to pour over the side like a dough eruption, and run down and solidify as bread.

This was, however, by the help of flour, soon reduced to normal proportions, banged into tins, and thrust into the oven, Mrs. Slee performing each part of her task as if she

were very angry with the compound, and desirous of punishing it for being so good. But it was a way she had, induced by the behaviour of her master, Simeon Slee.

Meanwhile, Joe Banks, in spite of the friendly welcome he had received, refused to sit down, but stood leaning on the stick he carried.

“Nay, parson, nay,” he said, “I haven’t come to stop. I just thowt I’d act like a man now, and say I arks your pardon, sir, hearty like, and wi’ all my heart.”

“My pardon, for what, Banks?”

“For acting like a fond, foolish owd father the other day, and giving ye the rough side of my tongue, when you came to gi’ me good advice.”

“Oh, don’t talk about that, man, pray.”

“Yes, I thowt I would, because I ought to ha’ knowd better, and not been such a blind owd owl. But there you know, parson—and I suppose you’re used to it—them as you goes

to advise always coots oop rough. So I thowt, as I said, I'd arsk your pardon."

"If I've anything to pardon, Banks, it was forgiven the next minute. I look upon life as too short, and the work we have to do as too much, to allow room for nursing up such troubles as that."

"Don't say any more, parson," said Joe, wringing his hand, with a grip of iron; "it makes me feel 'shamed like o' my sen."

"I don't see why," said the vicar. "If I had been a father I dare say I should have done the same."

"Down on your knees to-night, parson, and pray as you never may be," cried the old man fiercely; "that you may never nurse and bring up and love a bairn whom you toil for all your life, to find she throws you over for the first face that pleases her."

"But we are not quite certain yet, Banks," said the vicar, laying his hand on the other's arm.

“Yes, I am,” said Banks, sturdily. “I know enew to satisfy me; but stop a moment, I meant to have a word about that, and let’s have it at once. It’s all my own doing, I know, but there it is, and it can’t be undone. Tell me, though, parson, can you say from your heart, ‘Joe Banks, you’re mista’en; I don’t think Richard Glaire — Richard Glaire — dal me! I will say it.’”

The old man’s voice turned hoarse, and shook at last, so that he could not speak, as he came to Richard Glaire’s name, when, after an effort, he exclaimed as above, and then went on—

“I don’t think Richard Glaire stole away your bairn?”

There was silence in the room, as the vicar looked sorrowfully in the keen eyes of Daisy’s father.

“I say, parson,” he repeated, “can you say fro’ your heart, ‘Joe Banks, you’re mista’en; I don’t think Richard Glaire stole away your bairn?’”

There was another pause, and Joe Banks spoke again.

"Can you say that, parson?"

"No, Banks," said the vicar, sadly. "I may be mistaken, but I cannot say what you wish."

"Thanky, parson, thanky," said the old man, quietly. "You'll shake hands with me afore I go."

"Indeed I will, Mr. Banks; indeed I will," said the vicar, heartily. "But you are not going yet."

"Yes, I'm going now, parson, and if in the time as is to come you hear owt as isn't good of me, put it down to circumstances. You will, wean't you?"

"You're not going away, Banks?"

"Nay, nay, man, I'm not going away. Just do as I say, that's all."

"How is your wife? I hope better. She seemed ill yesterday."

"Ah, ah, you called yesterday, as she said. Thanky, she's on'y a poor creature now. This

job's unsattled her. Good-bye, parson, good-bye."

"But is there anything I can do for you, Banks?"

"Nay, parson, nowt as I knows on. Good-bye, good-bye."

He shook hands, and went quietly out to the garden, and along the path, leaving the vicar wondering.

"Did he mean anything by his words?" the vicar said, "or was it only in connection with asking me to forgive him? He couldn't mean—oh, no, he's too calm and subdued for that. He's like a man who knows the worst now, and is better able to bear it. I should be glad to see the lock-out at an end, but, even if it were, that poor old man would never go to work for Richard Glaire again."

CHAPTER XX.

AT DUMFORD CHURCH.

THE vicar used to look sadly at his church every Sunday, at the damp-stained walls, the unpainted high deal pews, with their straw-plaited cushions and hassocks, dotted with exceptions, where the better-off inhabitants had green baize, and in the case of the doctor's, the lawyer's, and the Big House pews, scarlet moreen cushions.

It was a dreary, damp place, with a few ugly old tablets, and one large monument, which nearly half filled the little chancel with its clumsy wrought-iron railings, enclosing the gilded and painted marble effigies of Roger de Dumford and Dame Alys, his wife, uncomfortably lying on their backs on a cushion not

large enough for them, and turning up the rosetted shoes that they wore in the most ungainly way. Sir Roger was in slashed doublet and puffed breeches, and wore a ruff as stiff as marble could make it, and so did Dame Alys, in long stomacher and farthingale; while their great merits were enumerated, and the number of children they had issue was stated on the tablet on the wall.

This great tomb went pretty close up to the communion-rail, and for generations past the various vicars had hung their surplices on the rails, and changed them for their gowns in the shade, for the vestry was over the porch at the south door, and was only opened for parish meetings, when the officials went in and came out, to adjourn and do business at the big room at the Bull.

Always damp, and smelling of very bad, mouldy cheese, was that church. The school-mistress, a limp, melancholy woman, always used to give it out to the schoolmaster as her

opinion that it was the bodies buried beneath the flags—a matter rather open to doubt, as no one had been interred there for over a hundred years, while the damp-engendered mould and fungi in corner and on wall spoke for themselves.

No stove to warm the place in winter ; few windows to open in summer, to admit the pleasant warm air ; the place was always dank, dark, and ill-smelling, and from its white-washed beams overhead to its ancient flag flooring, and again from the stained glass windows on either side, all was oppressive, cold, and shudder-engendering.

Let it not be imagined, however, that there were stained glass windows of wondrous dye. Nothing of the kind, for they were merely stained and encrusted by time of a dingy, ghastly, yellowish tint, and as full of waves and blurs as the old-fashioned glass could be.

The consequence was the people were slow to come to church, and quick to get out. One

or two vicars had had ideas of improving the place, and had mooted the matter at public and parochial meetings. The result had always been whitewash—whitewash on the ceilings, and whitewash on the walls.

The question had been mooted again.

More whitewash.

Again, and again, and again, as years rolled on.

More whitewash, and whitewash, and whitewash. Even the two old rusty helmets and pairs of gauntlets hung up in the chancel, said to have been worn by great De Dumfords of the past, had been whitewashed, with a most preservative effect, saving where the rust had insisted upon coming through in stains of brown. The result was that, thanks to the churchwarden's belief in lime as representing purity, Dumford was the most whitewashed church in the country, and it stood up in waves and corrugations all over the walls, where the damp had not caused it to peel off in plates,

varying in thickness from that of a shilling to half an inch ; and these scales had a knack of falling into pews during service time, probably from the piercing character of the music causing vibrations that they could not stand.

That music on Sundays was not cheerful, for there was no organ governed by one will, the minstrelsy being supplied by Owd Billy Stocks, who played dismally upon a clarionet, which wailed sadly for the cracks all down its sides ; by Tommy Johnson, the baker, who blew a very curly crooked French horn, which he always seemed to fear would make too much noise, so held it in subjection by keeping his fist thrust up the bell ; by Joey South, a little old man in tight leather pantaloons, skimpy long-tailed coat, and tight-squeezy hat, turned close up to the sides at the brims, giving him a tighter appearance altogether than the great umbrella, which, evidently an heirloom, he always carried under his arm, as if it were a stiffened fac-simile of himself as he walked to

church preceded by a boy carrying his instrument—a thing like a thick black gun, with a brass crook about a foot long coming out of one side—Joey South called it his “barsoon,” but as he sat cuddling it in church, it looked more like some wonderful Eastern pipe that he was smoking, while it emitted strange sounds like a huge bumble-bee stopped constantly in its discourse by a finger placed over its mouth ; by Johnny Buffam, the shoemaker, who blew a large brass affair like a small steam thrashing-engine, and boomed and burred in it like “an owd boozard clock,” as Kitty Stocks said ; and lastly, by Trappy Pape, who used to bring a great violoncello in a green baize bag, and saw away solemnly in a pair of round tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles.

These variations of the Christian names of the sacred band were, as before said, common to the town, where every man was a Dicky, or a Tommy, or a Joey, or the like, and generally with an “Owd ” before it. The clergyman our vicar

succeeded was the Reverend James Bannister, but he was always known as "Owd Jemmy," and it was a matter of regret to the popular wits of the place that the Reverend Murray Selwood's name offered no hold for the ingenious to nickname, so they settled down to "Owd Parson," and so he was called.

But to return to the choir.

They sat in a gallery that crossed the western end of the church, and on Sundays such of them as put in an appearance had it, with the singers and the school-children, all to themselves; and let it not be supposed that the preponderance of bass was noticeable, for it was pretty well drowned by the shrill treble, as the musicians did not get much music out of their instruments, save and excepting Billy Stokes, who always seemed to be dying in agonies, such wails did he send forth in "Portugal," "Hanover," and "Old Hundredth," that it took all the efforts of the basses to smother his piercing cries.

The bells, pulled for a treat by five boys under the direction of Jacky Budd, had had their say; the musicians had blundered and clumped up the dark staircase to their seats, and Trappy Pape was working away with his bow upon a large cake of rosin, while Joey Tight, as he was more generally called, was sucking his brass pipe, and conning over the notes he had known for fifty years, to the great admiration of the schoolboys, one and all longing to "have a blow at that theer big black thing." The "tingtang" which went for ten minutes in a cracked, doleful, sheep-bell style, was being pulled, and the vicar was standing in his surplice, waiting for the clock to strike—which it would do sometimes with tolerable accuracy—and he was thinking of how he should like to move the people to have something done by way of restoration to the church, when Jacky Budd, with one thumb in his arm-hole, came slinking softly up to try and get a bit of whispered conversation with the parson.

"Strange great congregation this morning, sir," he whispered.

"Indeed, Budd," said the vicar, brightening.
"I'm glad of that."

"I counted 'em, sir—there's two-and-forty."

"Forty-two, Budd," said the vicar, with his countenance falling; "and the church holds seven hundred."

"Two-and-forty, sir, wi'out the school-children."

"But you counted the singers, Budd?"

"No, sir, I didn't; two-and-forty wi'out."

"Ah, Budd, it's very sad," said the vicar, sighing. "I hoped for better things by now."

"Why, we never used to hev such congregations in the owd vicar's time, sir, as we do wi' you. We never used to hev more than five-and-twenty o' wet Sundays, and I hev know'd him preach to six."

"Hah!" A long sigh and a mental question,
"What can I do to bring them here?" as

Jacky Budd shuffled as far as the door and back.

“Owd Robinson from the Bull, and his missus, just come in, sir; and Master Bultitude and Miss Jessie, and John Maine from the farm, makes forty-seven, sir. If I might make so bold, sir, don’t you think we ought to hev a collection?”

“Why, that’s due next Sunday, Budd, and a strange clergyman coming,” said the vicar, hardly able to restrain a smile.

“That’s why I said it, sir,” said Budd, slily. “You wean’t get a score o’ people here nex’ Sunday.”

The vicar shook his head, and looked at his watch, which Jacky took as a hint to go, and he went as far as his desk, opened his book, and then saw something that made him softly shuffle back to where the vicar was waiting for the first stroke of the clock to start for the reading desk.

“They’ve come to the big pew, sir,” he whispered behind his hand.

“What?”

“Mrs. Glaire, sir, and Miss Eve, and young Master Dicky.”

The vicar started slightly. This was a change, indeed, and full of promise. Richard Glaire, who had not been out of the house nor into the garden since the attack made upon him, and who had never been seen in the old pew since the vicar's coming, had walked down the High Street between his mother and Eve, and made his appearance at church.

“Well, of course, he would be safe on such a day,” thought the vicar, “and the people have been quieter. God grant this is the beginning of the end, and that this little feud may be succeeded by peace.”

He thought this as the clock was striking, and he walked to the reading-desk, glanced through the Prayer-Book and Bible, where the markers were, to see that Jacky Budd, whose memory was erratic, had made no mistakes, and given him wrong psalms and lessons to

read, and then turned to the opening sentences, and was about to commence ; but the presence of Richard Glaire troubled him. He was glad at heart that he should be there, and now that he had come he wished to influence him for good,—to bring him to a different way of thinking, for Eve's sake ; and now these sentences all seemed, as of course they were, personal, and such as would make Richard Glaire think that they were selected and aimed specially at him.

“When the wicked man,” read the vicar to himself. No. “I acknowledge.” No, no, no, one after the other they seemed warnings to the sinner, such a one as Richard Glaire, and in the hurried glance down he came to, “I will arise.”

“More pointed still,” he thought, and having no time to study the question, he read the two last, beginning, “Enter not into judgment,” &c., and “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” &c.

As the service went on the vicar's eyes took in by turns the members of his congregation, and at last he let them light on the Glaire's pew.

There stood Mrs. Glaire, looking old and care-worn ; in another corner, Eve Pelly, with her sweet, innocent face, looking to him angelic in her rapt absorption, as she listened to his words, and there, with his back to them, and leaning over the edge of the pew in a negligent *degagé* attitude, as if bent on showing the congregation the whiteness of the hands he held up for inspection, stood Richard Glaire, gazing at him with half-closed eyes, in a supercilious, sneering manner.

“Poor boy!” thought Murray Selwood, as his eyes met those of the young man for a moment, and then, like a sudden flash, a thought occurred to the vicar, which made the blood flush to his face, and then seem to run back to his heart.

It was the time for reading the first lesson,

and his hand was seeking the book-mark in the Bible.

“Sixth Sunday after Trinity,” he thought. “He will think it chosen, and directed at him. What should he do? Change it and read the lesson for that day of the month. No, that would look as if he had purposely avoided it, and it would take some few minutes to find, for his calmness was leaving him, and he could not recall the date. No, he must read it—it was his duty, and it was like a stroke of fate that Richard Glaire should come there upon such a day.

His voice shook slightly, and his eyes dimmed as he read the first words of the beautiful old story, and then moved to the very core, and in deep rich tones, he read on in the midst of a stillness only broken by the soft chirp of some sparrow on the roof; while Mrs. Glaire’s head went lower and lower, Eve Pelly’s hand stole softly across to touch her, and the young man sat with his back to the

congregation, now white with rage, now burning with shame.

"A coward—a sneak!" he muttered between his ground teeth. "He has chosen that chapter to shame me before all the people. I won't stand it. I'll get up and go out."

But to do that was not in Richard Glaire's power. He had not the strength of mind and daring for so defiant an act, and he sat on, thrilled in every fibre, as the deep, mellow voice went on telling how the Lord sent Nathan unto David, and he told him of the rich man, who in his wealth spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, but took the poor man's lamb, who was to him as a daughter; and as these words were told, there came from the body of the church the stifled sobs of one of the women of the congregation who could not control her feelings. And at last, in spite of himself, Murray Selwood was moved to such an extent by the words he was reading, that he spoke as if he were the

prophet of old, his voice rising and falling as it thrilled his hearers, till it was deep and denunciatory, as he exclaimed:—

“And Nathan said unto David—Thou art the man.”

There was an audible sigh of relief as the lesson ended, and the vicar wiped the dew from his forehead, for it had been to him a trial, and his voice was low and troubled as he continued the service, but feeling glad at heart that he had not chosen that lesson for the strong, suitable discourse which he afterwards delivered.

It is needless to do more than refer to it here, even though Joey Tight stood up with his hand to his ear so as not to miss a word, and winked and blinked ecstatically, and though it, too, struck Richard Glaire home, inasmuch as it was in allusion to the trade troubles in the town, and ended with a prayer that the blessings of unity and brotherly love might come among them, and peace and plenty once more reign in their homes.

Old Bultitude and Jessie were waiting at the door as the vicar came out, to look in a troubled way up the High Street, after Richard Glaire and his companions; but there was nothing to fear, the street was deserted, save by the people leaving church.

"He's raight enew to-day, parson," said the old farmer, divining his thought. "Nobody will touch him o' Sunday, and wi' the women. Zoonds, but you gi'e it him hot, and no mistake. That were clever o' ye. Dal it all, parson, I could like to ha' offended you, for the sake of getting such a tongue thrashing."

"My dear Mr. Bultitude," said the vicar sadly, "if you will look at your Prayer-book, you will find that this was no plan of mine, but a matter of accident, or fate—who can say which."

"Weer it, though?" said the farmer, as they walked on, his road lying by the vicarage, and he stared round-eyed at his companion. "Think o' that, Jess. I wouldn't ha' believed

it: it's amazing. By the way, parson, I want a few words wi' you. Jess, lass, walk on a bit. Theer, ye needn't hurry. I don't want ye to o'ertake John Maine."

Jessie blushed, and the tears came into her eyes as she went on a few paces; and the farmer, as soon as she was out of ear-shot, pointed at her with his thumb.

"Bit touched, parson, courting like. She's fond o' that lad, John Maine, and I want her to wed young Brough."

"Maine seems to me a very good worthy young fellow," said the vicar.

"Hem!" said the farmer. "I don't know so much about that, and t'other's got the brass."

"Money won't bring happiness, Mr. Bultitude."

"Raight, parson, raight; but it's main useful. Me and my poor missis, as lies there in chutchyard, hedn't nowt when we began; but we made some," he continued, proudly.

"By sheer hard work, no doubt."

"Ay, we hed to work, but that's nowt after all. I wouldn't gi' a straw for a lad as can't work, and is skeart of it. Why, when I went to the bit o' farm, 'Boottherboomp' they used to call it then, cause of the 'boottherboomps.'"

"Let me see, that's your local name for the bittern, is it not?"

"Yes; big brown bird, some'at like a hern," said old Bultitude. "They lives in wet, swampy places. Well, parson, that place was all one swamp when I went, and I says to mysen, where rushes is a growing now, I mean to grow whe-at; and so every year I used to do nowt but spend i' dreaning, and now there isn't a finer farm i' the county."

"It's perfect," said the vicar, "perfect."

"Well, I'm glad to hear thee say it, parson, because I know thee sayst what thee means, and thou'rt as good a judge of a crop and stack as iver I see, for a man as isn't a farmer. It isn't ivery man as comes fro' the wild parts

'bout London as can tell as a hog or a hogget isn't a pig, but a ship, and knows what he's worth to a shilling or two. But just hearken to me, going on like that, when I wanted to say a word or two 'bout our John Maine."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, parson. I'm mortal feard that lad's going wrong. He's got some 'at on his mind, and he's always in confab wi' young Podmore as was Daisy Banks' sweetheart, and there's some mystery about it. Young Brough says he's mixed up wi' a blackguard low lot, poaching or some'at o' that sort; but I don't tak' much notice o' he, for he's a bit jealous of him. But what I want you to do is to get hold of John and talk to him, for he's upsetting our Jess, and I shall hev to get shoot of him if things don't alter, and I doan't want to do that, parson, for I rayther like the lad, if he'd go back to what he weer. Good day; you'll see him, will you?"

"Indeed I will."

"And young Podmore, too, parson?"

"Yes, if it's necessary."

"Oh, it is; and you'll put 'em raight, I know. But I say, parson—but that was a hot one for Dicky Glaire. Good-bye."

They parted at the gate, and the vicar went in, just as Sim Slee went by with a man dressed in black—a heavy, white-faced man, with a good deal of black whiskers, who looked as if his clothes did not fit him, and as if he was uncomfortable out of a workman's suit, and could not find a place for his hands, with which, by the aid of a great cotton handkerchief, he kept wiping his face.

"I shouldn't wonder if that's the deputation," said the vicar. "Well, I hope they'll settle the dispute."

Unfortunately, though the vicar's guess was right, the deputation was not a man to further the prospects of peace.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 045832828